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Eminent Women Series

EDITED BY JOHN H. INGRAM

MRS. SIDDONS.

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MRS. SIDDONS.

BY

MRS. A. KENNARD.

LONDON:
W. H. ALLEN & CO., 13 WATERLOO PLACE, S.W.

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PREFACE.

In spite of Mrs. Siddons's professed shrinking from the celebrity that biographers would confer upon her, and her preference for the "still small voice of tender relatives and estimable friends," we know that she bequeathed her Memoranda, Letters, and Diary to the poet Campbell—an intimate friend during her latter years—with a request that he would prepare them for publication. How, with the ample material at his command, Campbell wrote so bad a life, it is difficult to conceive. He seemed conscious himself that he was not doing justice to his subject. The task of finishing it weighed on him like a nightmare. To secure himself from interruption he would fix a placard on the door of his chambers announcing that "Mr. Campbell was engaged with the biography of Mrs. Siddons, and was not to be disturbed."

Though performing the task unwillingly, he stubbornly refused to allow anyone else to attempt it. When Mrs. Jameson contemplated writing a life of the great actress he was most indignant, and expressed himself as unable to understand how Mrs. Combe (Cecilia Siddons) could patronise a life of her mother

by Mrs. Jameson, knowing that he had been appointed the biographer.

Boaden's account of Mrs. Siddons is sketchy and meagre, and his style, if possible, more pedantic and ponderous than Campbell's. Crabb Robinson declared it to be "one of the most worthless books of biography in existence."

In writing an account of a woman like Mrs. Siddons, or, indeed, of anyone whose life has been passed entirely before the public, it is necessary to divest the character as much as possible of the legendary traditions adhering to it. It must be brought down into the regions of ordinary life, and the only way to accomplish this is to transcribe her actual words and expressions written without thought of publication. We must therefore ask our readers to forgive us for quoting so many of her letters in full. When we attempt to shorten or interpolate, all their easy charm and freshness seems to evaporate.

Mr. Percy Fitzgerald, in his *Lives of the Kembles*, has incorporated Mrs. Siddons's history with that of her brother, John Kemble, and written by far the best biography yet done of the great actress. To him we must express our deep obligation, and almost our contrition, for venturing to treat a subject already so ably handled in his interesting volumes. We must also express our gratitude to Mr. Alfred Morrison and Mr. Thibaudeau for allowing us to make use of the valuable documents contained in the Morrison collection of autograph letters.

NINA A. KENNARD.

February, 1887.

CONTENTS.

	PAGE
CHAPTER I.—Parentage and Childhood	1
CHAPTER II.—Marriage	18
CHAPTER III.—"Davey"	33
CHAPTER IV.—Work	48
CHAPTER V.—Success	67
CHAPTER VI.—Dublin and Edinburgh	81
CHAPTER VII.—Clouds	95
CHAPTER VIII.—Lady Macbeth	115
CHAPTER IX.—Friends	130
CHAPTER X.—1782 to 1798	149
CHAPTER XI.—Sheridan	172
CHAPTER XII.—Hermione	186
CHAPTER XIII.—Sorrows	202
CHAPTER XIV.—Westbourne Farm	216
CHAPTER XV.—Retirement	239
CHAPTER XVI.—Old Age	255

MRS. SIDDONS.

CHAPTER I.

PARENTAGE AND CHILDHOOD.

The lax morality prevailing in England at the time of the Restoration, produced a literary and dramatic school of art suited to the taste of the public. Congreve wrote *Love for Love*, and coolly remarked, when accused of immorality, "that, if *it* were an immodest play, he was incapable of writing a modest one."

The reaction from the almost overstrained energy and chivalry of the Elizabethan age, which a century of Stuart rule effected in the minds of Englishmen, had brought them thus low. Manners were looked upon as better than morals. Scepticism as better than belief, as well when it concerned the tenets of the Bible as the honour of their neighbours' wives.

The stage—especially when the public has no other intellectual outlet—is invariably the test by which we can discover the moral condition of a country. When that condition is unnatural and feverish, proportionally artificial and stimulating must be the mental food presented to it, until the audience gradually

becomes incapable of digesting any other. The want at the end of the seventeenth century produced the supply. A drama arose which was polished, dainty, finished in detail, but from the stage of which virtue was excluded like a poor relation, who, clad in fustian, and shod with hob-nail boots, is not supposed to be fit company for profligate gentlemen in gold-embroidered coats and lace ruffles.

Shakespeare was too strong food for the digestive capacities of an age whose poets preferred falsehood to truth. Pepys speaks of *Henry VIII.* as a simple thing made up "of a great many patches." *The Tempest,* he thinks, "has no great art, but yet good above ordinary plays." *Othello* was to him "a mean thing," compared to the last new comedy. He is good enough, however, to allow that he liked or disliked *Macbeth,* according to the humour of the hour, but there was a "*divertissement*" in it, which struck him as being a droll thing in tragedy.

The fiery energy of Pitt was needed to galvanise the paralysed enthusiasm, the fanatical earnestness of John Wesley was needed to arouse the deadened moral sense of England. Religion and patriotism come first as important factors in the education of a people, but they are closely followed by poetry and the drama. If Pitt and Wesley did much to elevate the political and religious tone, as much was done to elevate the literary and dramatic by Samuel Johnson, Oliver Goldsmith, David Garrick, and Sarah Siddons.

Our readers may be inclined to think we exaggerate the importance of the stage, by thus classing poets and players together; but if we wish to appreciate the influence wielded by players a hundred years ago, we have but to examine the careers of these last two great

artists; and if we wish to appreciate the moral reform effected, we have but to turn to a list of the plays in vogue at the time of the Restoration and the plays in vogue twenty years after Garrick had been acting, and ten years after Sarah Siddons's first appearance.

The reaction came, as do all reactions, with too great intensity; vice was not only punished in its own person, but the sins of the father were visited on the children, with a harshness almost Semitic. Through the fine-spun sentiment of *The Fatal Marriage*, and the melodramatic heroism of *The Grecian Daughter*, two of Mrs. Siddons' greatest parts, we trace the high moral tone that cleared away eventually the foul and noisome atmosphere hanging over the theatrical world. Gloomy morality and dramatic pathos paved the way for the return of the *Winter's Tale* and *Hamlet*.

Justly are the memories of David Garrick and Sarah Siddons revered by Englishmen, not only because they devoted their genius to the reinstatement of England's greatest dramatist, but that, also, by their strict adherence to an almost rigid decorum in public behaviour and private life, they raised a profession that had hitherto been despised and looked upon as one unbefitting a modest woman, or an honourable man, into a position of respectability and consideration.

That these two great artists had faults, who can wonder? No reformation was ever yet accomplished by the flaccid-minded ones, and we must remember that many of the stories told of his vanity and meanness and her hardness and reserve, were circulated by their enemies on and off the stage, because of their very rigidity and morality. In spite, however, of some passing clouds, never was there a career so

admired, a personality so adored in public life, as that of Mrs. Siddons. Whenever she appeared, enthusiastic applause rang through the house, not only on account of her pre-eminent genius, but because of her untarnished private character. Step by step we propose to trace the career of this wonderful woman, who, dowered with singular beauty and genius, and placed amid all the temptations of a profession in which so few of her sex remain pure, has shown an example of unswerving rectitude and religious fervour, unusual in any walk of life, keeping her to the last a "great simple being," direct and truthful, noble and industrious. She had faults, as we have said, but they were so far outbalanced by her virtues that we can well afford to forgive them; always remembering that, though only the daughter of a strolling actor, born amidst the lowliest surroundings, she conceived an ideal of her art which enabled her to raise the stage of her country, from consisting simply in the delineation of the coarsest gallantry, into a source of the highest moral and artistic instruction.

Far from the strife of political parties or the vagaries of fashionable dramatists, both she and Garrick, with whose name we have coupled hers, were born in the romantic country of Wales: he at Hereford; she in the small town of Brecon, by the shores of the river Usk. The following copy of her certificate of baptism, from the register-book in St. Mary's, Brecon, is given in the *Gentleman's Magazine* in 1826: "Baptism, 1755, July 14th, Sarah, daughter of George Kemble, a commedian (*sic*), and Sarah, his wife, was baptised. Thomas Bevan, curate." Her father's name was "Roger," not "George," as given above. The young couple's theatrical wanderings happened to

bring them, at the time of Mrs. Kemble's confinement, to the little Welsh town, where they had put up in the High Street at a public-house familiarly called "The Shoulder of Mutton." In 1755 the inn was a picturesque gable-fronted old house, with projecting upper storey, exhibiting as sign-board a large shoulder of mutton. It was much frequented by the farmers on market-day for its good ale and its legs of mutton, which might regularly in those days be seen roasting before the kitchen fire, on a spit turned by a dog in a wheel.

Brecon is not without dramatic and historic interest, and, as Mrs. Siddons afterwards was fond of pointing out, is several times mentioned by Shakespeare. Buckingham, in *Richard III.*, says:

> Oh! let me think on Hastings, and begone
> To Brecon whilst my fearful head is on.

Sir Hugh Evans also, that "remnant of Welsh flannel," in the *Merry Wives of Windsor*, was curate of the priory of Brecon in the days of Queen Elizabeth; and from the intimacy which existed between Shakespeare and the priors of the priory, Campbell tells us, "an idea prevails that he frequently visited them at their residence in Brecon, and that he not only availed himself of the whimsicalities of old Sir Hugh, but that he was indebted for much of the romantic setting of the *Midsummer Night's Dream* to the surrounding scenery, where Puck and his fairy companions are familiar household words, one of the glens in the neighbourhood being named Cwm Pwca, or the Valley of Puck." Be this as it may, we cannot wonder at Mrs. Siddons' desire to connect the places that played important parts in her fortunes with the name of the great poet whom she honoured so devotedly and so well.

Roger Kemble, father of the little girl, was the manager of a strolling company of actors, his theatrical "circuit" including the counties of Staffordshire, Gloucestershire, and Warwickshire. He was born in Hereford in the year 1721, and it was said that he began life as a "barber." John Kemble, when convivial, would sometimes allude to this fact; but, indeed, in those days many actors are said to have been "barbers," the fact being that, when strolling, it was sometimes found convenient for one of the company to combine the two professions. He was a Roman Catholic, and was fond of tracing his descent from an old English family, claiming as ancestors a Captain Kemble, who fought at Worcester in the camp of the Stuarts, and a Father Kemble, who died for the faith a few years later.

Her mother was a Miss Ward, daughter also of an actor and manager of a strolling company. Peg Woffington, when only fifteen, played at his theatre in Auniger Street, until Mr. Ward's strait-laced severity drove the wild young Irish girl away. The Wards seem, indeed, to have been almost Methodistical in their strict religious views. The following inscription may be seen on their tomb at Leominster:

> Here, waiting for the Saviour's great assize,
> And hoping through His merits hence to rise
> In glorious mode, in this dark closet lies
> JOHN WARD, GENT.,
> Who died Oct. 30th, 1773, aged 69 years;
>
> Also
> SARAH, HIS WIFE,
> Who died Jan. 30th, 1786, aged 75 years.

Mrs. Siddons was, therefore, 31 before her grandmother died. Tough, vigorous races, both Kembles

and Wards, full of religion and prejudices, which they kept intact until they died. On one side we see the great actress inherited Irish blood. John Ward was an Irishman, and Sally, his daughter, was born in Clonmel. Roger Kemble, a member of Ward's company, aided by his good looks, courteous manners, and fine black eyes, won the heart of Sally Ward. The father strongly objected to the match; but, finding opposition of no avail, at last reluctantly consented, making the hackneyed joke—afterwards attributed to Roger Kemble himself, on the occasion of Sarah's marriage with Siddons—that "he wished her not to become the wife of an actor, and she had certainly complied with his request."

The young couple were married at Cirencester in the year 1753. Sarah was their first child. John Philip, the second, was born two years after his sister, at Prescott in Lancashire. They had ten brothers and sisters, and, although all of them—except those who died in very early youth—went on the stage, none reached the pre-eminence of the two eldest. They were an intelligent, industrious family, blossoming into genius in one member and very remarkable talent in another. As Roger Kemble was a Catholic and his wife a Protestant, it was agreed that the girls were to be brought up in the mother's faith, the boys in their father's.

The accounts given us of Mrs. Siddons' childhood are meagre; but, from numerous memoirs and racy theatrical reminiscences, we can see what the life of the travelling actor in England a hundred years ago was like, with all its accompaniments of squalor and humiliation. In these days, when actors and actresses of no very great eminence are whirled about in first-

class express carriages or in special trains from place to place, it is difficult, in spite of accurate information, to realise the hardships attending the profession then. The travelling from town to town in all weathers, in carts little better than those constituting a gipsy caravan; the parading through the streets, offering play-bills and puffs. A resident of Warwick—Walter Whiter, the commentator on Shakespeare—when Mrs. Siddons had "become known all the world over," recalled as one of the sights of his boyhood in the town, the daylight procession of old Roger Kemble's company, advertising and giving a foretaste of the evening's entertainment. A little girl, the future Queen of Tragedy, marched with them in white and spangles, her train held by a handsome boy in black velvet, John Philip Kemble, of the "all hail hereafter."

It is almost impossible to conceive the ignominy the company was subjected to, when either the mayor of the town—which was often the case—had forbidden theatrical representation, or when, owing to the pranks of some rowdy members of the troupe, the feeling of the inhabitants was aroused against them collectively, and they were obliged to cringe and supplicate for a renewal of the favour of the changeable and narrow-minded provincials.

Enough of the Puritan spirit still remained to induce Government to frequently place restrictions on the representations of the "Servants of Belial." A story is told of the Kemble company evading the tax on unlicensed houses, introduced by Sir Robert Walpole, by selling tooth-powder at a shilling a box, and giving the ticket; a proceeding which reminds one of the old smuggling trick of selling a sham sack of corn, and making a present of the keg of brandy placed within it.

The representations of these strolling actors, Fitz-Gerald tells us, took place sometimes in a coach-house or barn, or sometimes in a room of an inn; even the open inn-yard, with its galleries running round, was now and then converted into a theatre. All sorts of old clothes and decorations were borrowed, a few candles stuck in bottles in front, and then the play began. Very often the proceeds did not cover expenses, and either debts were made or the owner of the inn let them go scot-free in consideration of the amusement they had afforded his guests.

The shifts and tribulations, related later by the Kembles themselves, seem almost incredible. Stephen Kemble, the wittiest of the family, described with great humour a season of privation in a wretched village, where the unfortunate actors could not muster a farthing, and were in consequence dunned and abused by their landladies. To avoid their persecution he lay in bed two days, suffering the pangs of hunger, and then was obliged to take refuge in a distant turnip-field, where he persuaded a fellow-actor to accompany him by boasting of the hospitality and size of the establishment.

In one town the theatre was said to have been built, the stage in Sussex, the audience in Kent, the two being divided by a ditch, so as to enable the players to evade their bailiffs by escaping into another county. There is a certain humour and tragedy running through all these theatrical histories, that makes us laugh at one moment at the comical incidents related, and makes us sad the next to think of men of talent—often men of genius—being subjected to such degradation.

It is difficult to understand how Sarah and John

Kemble can have emerged from it so untainted by its associations, and so far above its social and artistic aims and ideals; or how their stately manners and stern ideas of morality and decorum can have been fostered in such an atmosphere. In blaming them, perhaps, later, for what their detractors called their "closeness" about money matters, we must remember that the years of suffering and privation they had been through, and the very laxity they saw around them, was likely to crystallise strong natures like theirs into hardness and rigidity, exaggerating, perhaps, their ideas of theatrical dignity and self-respect.

There can be no doubt, in spite of all its drawbacks, that, from a professional point of view, the Bohemian existence of the strolling comedian was a valuable discipline for artistic perception. The intimate communion in which all lived together, gave much more chance of expansion to rising genius than the artificial barriers now erected between the leader of a company and his subordinates. Not only was the freemasonry existing between underling and superior invaluable, but also the course of probation before country audiences, who, uninfluenced by prestige or fashion, spoke their mind without reserve. Young recruits, who arrived ignorant and raw, thus obtained the necessary ease of deportment and knowledge of stage effects, uninfluenced by preconceived ideas. The very fact, also, of so much depending on the individual excellence of the actor, independently of scenery and accessories, was a valuable stimulus. His expression, his action, had to tell the story.

In passing his earliest years upon the stage, the strolling actor obtained a power of identification with theatrical representation only to be thus acquired.

The atmosphere he breathed from his earliest years was dramatic. When quite a child, Sarah Kemble was announced as an "Infant phenomenon," at an entertainment the company gave. As she appeared, some confusion arose in the gallery which overpowered all her attempts. Her mother immediately led her down to the footlights, and made her recite the fable of *The Boys and Frogs*, which at once lulled the tumult and restored good humour. Thus early was the actress taught to dominate her audience, an art that stood her in good stead in after life.

Besides this early theatrical training, Sarah received as good an education in the ordinary rudiments of learning as it was possible for her energetic mother to obtain for her. Mrs. Kemble sent her child to respectable day schools, we are told, in the country towns to which their various wanderings brought the troupe. At Worcester, a schoolmistress of the name of Harris received her among her pupils at Thornloe House, refusing to accept any payment. An old lady, living not long ago, recalled perfectly the contempt of the young girls in the establishment for the "play actors' daughter," until, some private theatricals being set on foot, her histrionic taste and experience made her services extremely valuable. She won universal popularity by exhibiting a device for imitating a "sack back" with thick sugar-loaf paper procured from the grocer. But this education must have been desultory, for Roger Kemble could not afford to dispense with the girl's assistance.

Besides the appearance mentioned above, we hear of her acting as a child, in a barn at the back of the "Old Bell Inn," at Stourbridge, Worcestershire, when some officers quartered in the neighbourhood gave

their services. It is said that she burst into laughter at the most tragic moment, and inflamed to fury the military tragedian who acted with her. The play was *The Grecian Daughter*. Another tradition tells us that her first appearance in a regular five-act piece was as Leonora in *The Padlock*.

A play-bill of one of these early performances was found not long ago, pasted on a brick wall in a shoemaker's shop, in one of the country towns of the Kemble circuit.

Campbell tells that Roger Kemble determined not to allow his children to follow his vocation; we think, however, this statement must be bracketed with the legend of the ancestor at the battle of Worcester, for we find him, as we have seen, making Sarah appear when almost a baby, and taking John away from a day school at Worcester, while still in frock and pinafores, to act in Havard's tragedy of *Charles the First*. The characters were thus cast: James, Duke of Richmond, by Mr. Siddons, who was now an actor in Kemble's company; James, Duke of York, by Master John Kemble, who was then eleven years old; the young princess by Miss Kemble, then about thirteen; Lady Fairfax, by Mrs. Kemble. Singing between the acts by Mr. Fowler and Miss Kemble. In the April following, we again find "Mr. Kemble's company of Comedians" appearing in "a celebrated comedy," called *The Tempest, or the Enchanted Island*, with all the scenery, machinery, music, monsters, and the decorations proper to be given, entirely new. "The performance will open with a representation of a tempestuous sea (in perpetual agitation), and storm, in which the usurper's ship is wrecked; the wreck ends with a beautiful shower of fire; and the whole to con-

clude with a calm sea, on which appears Neptune, poetick god of the ocean, and his royal consort, Amphitrite, in a chariot drawn by sea-horses, &c. &c." It was in this performance, as Ariel, Chief Spirit, that, at the age of thirteen, Sarah made her first success. "She darted hither and thither," we are told, "with such airy grace; there was something so sprite-like in her free swiftness of motion, she seemed to be so entirely a creature born of the loves of a breeze and a sunbeam, that the whole audience broke into frantic applause at the end of the play, and her proud happy father began dimly to foresee his daughter's future."

Later, we find a performance by the company of *Love in a Village* announced, the names printed thus:—

Sir William Meadows, by Mr. K—mb—le.
Young Meadows, by Mr. S—dd—ns.
Rosetta, by Miss K—mb—le.
Madge, by Mrs. K—mb—le.
Housemaid, by Miss F. K—mb—le.

In the November following, John Philip was sent to Sedgely Park near Wolverhampton, a Catholic seminary. A short entry has been discovered in the College books, stating that "John and (*sic*) Philip Kemble came Nov. 3rd 1767, and brought 4 suits of clothes, 12 shirts, 12 pairs of stockings, 6 pairs of shoes, 4 hats, 2 *Daily Companions*, a Half Manual, knives, forks, spoons, *Æsop's Fables*, combs, 1 brush, 8 handkerchiefs, 8 nightcaps."

"Jack abiit, July 28, 1771."

After four years' residence here, his father sent him to the English College at Douai, to pursue a regular divinity course, his intention being to put the future Coriolanus into the priesthood.

Sarah still continued her studies, such as they were, at the various towns at which the "comedians" pitched their tent in their wanderings to and fro. She was taught vocal and instrumental music, and her father, remarking that she had fine natural powers of elocution, wished them cultivated by regular tuition as a part of her education, with no view to the stage; for this purpose he was tempted to enter into an agreement with an individual named William Combe, to give her a course of lessons.

The itinerant players were generally looked upon as a valuable addition to the inn parlour, and were welcome to a supper or a pot of ale in return for their society and amusing talk. It was on one of these occasions that Roger Kemble, who was a jovial and popular companion, met Combe, and was so attracted by his clever conversation, as to engage him as instructor to his daughter. Mrs. Kemble, evidently a woman of considerable common sense and penetration, refused to ratify the appointment, however, and Roger was obliged to get out of his promise by giving a performance for the benefit of the adventurer, who, having run through a fortune, was perfectly penniless.

To the last day of his life William Combe entertained a rancorous dislike to the great actress, and took pleasure in telling his friends maliciously how sordid her early life had been, and how he himself remembered her, when a girl, standing at the wing of a country theatre, beating snuffers against a candlestick to represent the sound of a windmill, in some rude pantomime.

Curiously enough, Milton's poetry more than Shakespeare's was the object of Sarah's admiration in her youth. When but ten years old, Campbell tells us,

she pored over *Paradise Lost* for hours together. The long, tiresome speeches between Adam and his wife, Satan's address to the sun—most children's despair—were her delight. The stately, ponderous verse suited her genius. The poet also gives us a story which, he tells, Mrs. Siddons left amongst her memoranda.

One day her mother promised to take her out with a party of friends picnicking in the neighbourhood. She was to wear a new pink dress, if the weather were fine. On going to bed the evening before the great event, she took her prayer-book with her, and opening it, as she supposed, at the prayer for fine weather, fell asleep with the book folded in her arms. At day-break the child found, to her dismay, that she had been holding the prayer for rain to her breast, and that the rain—Heaven having taken her at her word—was pelting against the windows. She went to bed again, with the book opened at the right place, and found the mistake remedied. When she awoke the morning was as rosy as the dress she was to wear.

Croker thinks it necessary, with all the weight of his authority, to refute this childish reminiscence, by pointing out that the prayers for rain and fine weather are on the same page of the prayer-book. We repeat the story principally because it shows the quaint methodistical piety and almost childish superstition which dwelt with Mrs. Siddons all through her chequered career. There is little doubt this piety was greatly owing to the principles inculcated by her mother.

Mrs. Kemble was a stately, austere woman, with a certain amount of genius and much force of character, and energetic and brave in her humble sphere of life, in most difficult circumstances. She fought by

the side of her husband a hard battle with poverty, and maintained and educated a family of twelve children. Spartan in her views of training youth, her imperious despotism of character has often been described as absolutely awful. It was the custom of the time to rule a household with some sternness, but her children trembled in her presence. In later days she addressed a characteristic reproof to her son John: "Sir, you are as proud as Lucifer." He and that majestic mother of his must indeed have been a Coriolanus and Volumnia in every-day life. Her voice had much of the measured emphasis of her daughter's, and her portrait, the only one we know of, that always hung in Mrs. Siddons' sitting-room, had an intellectual, almost grand expression, reminding us more of a good-looking Elizabeth Fry, with the tight-fitting frilled cap, and soft muslin handkerchief crossed around the throat, than what one might have pictured Sally Kemble, the strolling actress. Though extremely handsome when Roger Kemble first married her, and subjected to all the temptations of an actress's life, she never wavered in wifely devotion, and would maintain to the last day of her life that in some parts her Roger was "unparalleled." Hers is the only testimony to that effect, and we rather imagine him to have been a very indifferent actor, but a handsome good-tempered man with the manners of a gentleman, and views of life beyond his humble profession.

Proud, reserved, John Kemble paid, years after, the best tribute to his memory, when, on hearing of his death, he wrote to his brother from Madrid, on 31st December 1802: "How sincerely I always loved my father and respected his sound understanding, you

know too well for it to be necessary that I should even mention what I feel this moment, on opening your letter. God Almighty receive him into His everlasting happiness, and teach me to be resigned and resolute, to deserve to follow him when my appointed hour is come. My poor mother, though I know she will exert becoming firmness of mind in this, and every passage of her life, cannot but feel a melancholy void in losing the companion of her youth, the associate of her advancing years, and the father of her children. I regret from the very bottom of my heart that I cannot, with the most dutiful affection, assure her, at her feet, that what a grateful son can offer and do shall never be wanting from me to promote her content and ease and happiness. How, in vain, have I delighted myself in thousands of inconvenient occurrences on this journey, with the thought of contemplating my father's cautious incredulity while I related them to him! Millions of things, uninteresting maybe to anybody else, I had treasured up for his surprise and scrutiny! It is God's pleasure that he is gone from us. The resignation I had long observed in him to the will of Heaven, and his habitual piety, are no small consolation to me; yet I cannot help feeling a dejected swelling at my heart, that keeps me in a flood of tears for him, in spite of all I can do to stop them."

CHAPTER II.

MARRIAGE.

As Sarah Kemble passed from childhood to early womanhood, she continued to act the round of all the company's plays, taking more important parts as she grew older. The very atmosphere she breathed was dramatic. To walk the stage was a second nature to her. She was not, however, at the same time shut out from common-place every-day matters. She helped her mother in the household work, and went from a rehearsal to the making of a pudding or the darning of a pair of stockings. There is little doubt that this free mixing in the simple family life of her home gave a healthy balance to her mind. Like her mother, she always kept her domestic life intact in the midst of her professional occupations, and ever remained simple and womanly. Her fine friends in later days would tell how they had found her ironing a frock for one of her children, or studying a new part while she rocked the cradle of the last baby.

At the age of sixteen, Sarah's beauty had attracted the attention of her audiences. One or two squires of the county places they visited offered her their homage; but before she was seventeen her affections were

already engaged by a member of the troupe, an ex-apprentice from Birmingham,

We have already seen the name of Siddons figuring on the Kemble play-bills, when Sarah was only thirteen years of age. We can imagine, therefore, all the opportunities that the young people had of falling in love, rehearsing together, acting together, with the continual communion of interest brought about by their profession. No wonder that even Mr. Evans, a Welsh squire, with three hundred a year, who, enslaved by Sarah's singing of *Robin, Sweet Robin,* offered her his hand, was ignominiously refused.. Her parents, however, took a different view, and, allured by the splendour of Mr. Evans's offer, revoked the unwilling consent they had given to their daughter's engagement to Siddons, and summarily dismissed him from the company.

The indignant lover had recourse to a method of revenge that seems as novel as it was ungentlemanly. Being allowed a farewell benefit, he took the opportunity—it was at Brecon—of taking the audience into his confidence, and, in doggrel of the worst description, informed them of his woes:—

Ye ladies of Brecon, whose hearts ever feel
For wrongs like to this I'm about to reveal,
Excuse the first product, nor pass unregarded
The complaints of poor Colin, a lover discarded.

Yet still on his Phyllis his hopes were all placed,
That her vows were so firm they could ne'er be effaced;
But soon she convinced him 't was all a mere joke,
For duty rose up, *and her vows were all broke.*

Dear ladies, avoid one indelible stain,
Excuse me, I beg, if my verse is too plain;
But a jilt is the devil, as has long been confessed,
Which a heart like poor Colin's must ever detest.

We only give three verses of the eleven, being as much, we think, as our readers could submit to with patience.

How a girl of any spirit could forgive a lover for thus exposing their private affairs, and how a girl of any artistic appreciation could forgive a lover such bad verses, and take him back into her good graces, is more than we can understand. Mrs. Kemble, her mother, seemed to take the most correct view of the situation, for, instead of excusing "the first product" of the luckless poet, "his merits tho' small," she amply rewarded with a ringing box on the ears as he left the stage.

Jones, a member of Roger Kemble's company, preserved some verses written by Sarah to her lover, which show her to be as superior to him in taste and poetic perception, as she afterwards proved herself in dramatic power:—

Say not, Strephon, I 'm untrue,
When I only think of you;
If you do but think of me
As I of you, then shall you be
Without a rival in my heart,
Which ne'er can play a tyrant's part.
Trust me, Strephon, with thy love—
I swear by Cupid's bow above,
Nought shall make me e'er betray
Thy passion till my dying day:
If I live, or if I die,
Upon my constancy rely.

Siddons sufficiently relied on her constancy, in spite of his statements to "ye ladies of Brecon," to suggest to his beloved an immediate elopement, which suggestion she, as Campbell quaintly puts it, "tempering amatory with filial duty," politely declined, and her lover left.

As it was considered advisable to wean Sarah from old associations she was sent away for a time, and lived "under the protection" of Mrs. Greatheed, of Guy's Cliff in Warwickshire. Some have maintained that she was nursemaid or housemaid; but the terms she was on with her mistress, who presented her with a copy of Milton, precludes that idea, unless, by her smartness and industry, she, within a very short period of her engagement, worked herself into a better position. Campbell also points out that there were no children to be nursed in the Greatheed family at that time. "Her station with them," he continues, "was humble, but not servile, and her principal employment was to read to the elder Mr. Greatheed." The secret history of the green room informs us that she was maid to Lady Mary Bertie, Samuel Greatheed's second wife; and the Duchess of Ancaster told Mrs. Geneste she well remembered Lady Mary once bringing this attractive attendant with her on a visit.

It was remarked that she delighted in reciting fragments of plays for the entertainment of the servants' hall. Lord Robert Bertie was so fond of listening and admiring her declamation, that Lady Mary had to beg of him to desist, and "not encourage the girl to go on the stage." Young Greatheed told Miss Wynn later on that he had often heard Mrs. Siddons read *Macbeth* when she was his mother's maid.

Lady Mary confessed years afterwards to "Conversation" Sharp, that so queenly was the bearing of the young girl, even at that early age, that she always felt an irresistible inclination to rise from her chair when her maid came to attend her.

We can imagine the romantic girl wandering through

the lonely glades, and amongst the stately elm-groves of Guy's Cliff, or along the shores of the soft-flowing Avon, Shakespeare's Avon, that glides at the foot of the rocks between green meadows, dreaming of her love, and reading the poet she loved so well, whose birth-place and burial-place lay so near where she was. She must have heard reminiscences told of the great Jubilee that had taken place in 1769, only three years before, when Mr. Garrick and a "brilliant company of nobility and gentry," had come down to Stratford to celebrate the Shakesperean centenary. She little knew then that it was in a repetition of the Jubilee procession on the boards of Drury Lane she was destined to make her first bow to a London audience. There is a tradition that she met Garrick during her stay at Guy's Cliff. It is not impossible, as, after the Jubilee, he was a constant guest of the Greatheeds. The statement hardly tallies, however, with his writing sometime later to Moody to the effect that there "was a woman Siddons" acting at Liverpool, who might suit the Drury Lane company, and asking him to go and have a look at her. He might easily, however, have failed to connect the girl Sarah Kemble with the woman Mrs. Siddons.

It redounds much to the credit both of the Greatheeds and the actress, that afterwards, in spite of the change of circumstances, Mrs. Siddons ever remained a firm friend of the family. We find Miss Berry in 1822, forty-seven years later, writing in her journal:—

"Guy's Cliff, Tuesday, Jan. 1st.—Mrs. Siddons and her daughter arrived.

"Wednesday, 2nd.—Mrs. Siddons read *Othello*, the two parts of Iago and Othello, quite *à merveille*."

We find Bertie Greatheed standing sponsor for her

daughter Cecilia in 1794; and, greatest test of true friendship, writing a tragedy, *The Regent*, which failed disastrously.

In spite of stern parents and social obstacles, "Love will be ever Lord of all." William Siddons came several times to Guy's Cliff to see her. There, almost within sight of Shottery, where Shakespeare enacted his love story with Anne Hathaway, Sarah Kemble enacted hers. Wandering amidst the scented fields through which Shakespeare wandered, William Siddons again pleaded his cause, and was forgiven his bad verses and untimely confidences for the sake of his persistency.

The Kembles, seeing the attachment was serious, at last gave their consent, and in her nineteenth year Sarah Kemble became Mrs. Siddons.

The marriage took place at Trinity Church, Coventry, November 26th, 1773, and on the 4th of October following, the first child, Henry, was born, at Wolverhampton.

Mr. Siddons was just the man to fascinate a young and high-spirited girl. Good-looking, calm, sedate, even-tempered, not over-burdened with brain-power, and not too much will of his own. One might apply to him what Johnson said of Sheridan's father, "He is not a bad man, no, Sir; were mankind to be divided into good and bad, he would stand considerably within the ranks of the good." "A damned rascally player," the Rev. Henry Bate says forcibly, "but a civil fellow." We are told that he had not only that invention which in provincial theatres is the first of requisites, but he also possessed the second, a quick study, in almost unequalled perfection. He could make himself master of the longest dramatic character be-

tween night and night, and deliver it with the accuracy that seems to result only from long application; but so slight was the impression made, that it escaped from his memory in as few hours as he had employed to learn it. It was said later, by members of his wife's company, that though Siddons was a bad actor himself, he was an excellent judge, always drilling his wife, and very cross at any failure. His position as husband of the "great Mrs. Siddons," continually cast into the shade by her superiority, was an unthankful one, but we must confess that he filled it with commendable equanimity.

Their love wore better than the tinsel finery amidst which it began. The happy domestic life that succeeded was undoubtedly a great safe-guard amidst the dangers and difficulties of her life, saving her from much that was the ruin of her less protected sisters. We are told that in the days of her success, when her would-be admirers and lovers were legion, her husband's ear was the one to which she confided all the incidents of attempted gallantry, invariably attending an actress's life; and many were the hearty laughs they indulged in together over them. Perhaps now and then there was too great an inclination to make use of him. We find the poor man writing to managers as their obedient humble servant, making piteous appeals to Garrick, and put forward to dun Sheridan for the amount due to his wife; but at first they seem to have shared all the trials and struggles of their profession together.

Wolverhampton was their first stage after their marriage. The reigning Mayor seems to have nourished a prejudice against all actors. He had closed the King's Head Yard, and declared contemptuously

that "neither player, puppy, nor monkey," should perform in the town. After a popular demonstration, he was induced to rescind this harsh interdict; and by the Christmas of 1773, Roger Kemble was giving two stock dramas, *The West Indian* and *The Padlock*. Sarah appeared for the first time as Mrs. Siddons, at a farewell "Bespeak." An address, written by herself, and spoken on this occasion, has been found and published by an inhabitant of Wolverhampton:—

Ladies and Gentlemen,—my spouse and I
Have had a squabble, and I'll tell you why.
He said I must appear; nay, vowed 'twas right
To give you thanks for favours shown to-night.

* * * * *

He still insisted, and, to win consent,
Strove to o'ercome me with a compliment;
Told me that I the favourite here had reigned,
While he but small or no applause had gained.
"Pen me some lines where I may talk and swagger,
Of poisons, murders, done by bowl or dagger;
Or let me, with my brogue and action ready,
Give them a brush, my dear, of Widow Brady."

* * * * *

First, for a father, who on this fair ground,
Has met with friendship seldom to be found,
May th' All-Good Power your every virtue nourish,
Health, wealth, and trade in Wolverhampton flourish!"

This doggrel is almost on a par with Mr. Siddons's effusion to the Ladies of Brecon.

In the year following Mr. and Mrs. Siddons made their way to Cheltenham, then a town consisting of but one street, "through the middle of which ran a clear stream of water, with stepping-stones that served as a bridge." Already, however, its merits as a watering place had been noised abroad, and some of the "people of quality" had begun to find their way there. Seeing the play of *Venice Preserved* announced for

representation at the theatre, some of the fashionables took tickets, hoping to be highly diverted with the badness of the rustic performance. The man at the box-office, who had listened to their thoughtless remarks, reported them to Mrs. Siddons, who was to act the part of Belvidera. The young actress felt oppressed at the idea of the ordeal she was to be subjected to. Ridicule was all her life the one thing the tragic muse could not face; and from the moment of first coming on she was conscious of the antagonistic influence in one of the boxes, and imagined she heard sounds of suppressed laughter. She left the theatre after the play, deeply mortified. Next day, Mr. Siddons met Lord Aylesbury in the street, who inquired after Mrs. Siddons's health. He then expressed his admiration of her acting the night before, and declared that the ladies of his party had wept so excessively that they were laid up with headaches. Mr. Siddons rushed home to gladden his wife's heart with the news. The actress owed one of the truest friendships of her life to this incident, for Miss Boyle, Lord Aylesbury's step-daughter, came to call on her the same day to express her delight in person, and from that time never allowed the intimacy to drop. This lady seems to have possessed considerable artistic gifts in several ways, having, as Campbell tells us with much emphasis, written *An Ode to a Poppy*, which was thought full of merit in her day. What was of more importance to the young actress, however, than her new friend's qualifications for writing "odes" was her power of making costumes for different parts with her own hands, and her generosity in supplying "properties" from her own wardrobe. There were some, however, that even the Honourable Miss Boyle did not possess.

For the male habiliments of the Widow Brady, the young actress found on the night of the performance that no provision had been made. The story goes that a gentleman politely left the box where he was seated, lent her his coat, and stood in the side-scenes with a petticoat over his shoulders until his property was restored to him. Whether this courteous individual was Lord Aylesbury we are not told, but we know that he was one of Miss Boyle's party.

The particular fascination of Mrs. Siddons's acting in those early days was its simplicity and pathos, which, united with remarkable beauty and power of expression, gained the hearts of all rustic audiences. Her talent, however, seems to have been singularly immature, considering the continual practice she had enjoyed, almost from her cradle, in stage affairs. Rachel reached the summit of her power at seventeen, Mrs. Siddons not until she was thirty. She herself confesses later, in the account she gives of her first reading of *Macbeth*: "Being then only twenty years of age, I believed, as many others do believe, that little more was necessary than to get the words into my head; for the necessity of discrimination, and the development of character, at that time of my life, had scarcely entered into my imagination."

The power of drawing tears, however, was already hers, and rumours of the charm and beauty of the young actress had been wafted to London, reaching even the ears of the great Garrick himself. Mrs. Siddons tells us, in her Autograph Recollections: "Mr. King, by order of Mr. Garrick, who had heard some account of me from the Aylesbury family, came to Cheltenham to see me in the *Fair Penitent*. I knew neither Mr. King nor his purpose at the time." Neither

did she know of the second emissary whom Garrick sent, the Rev. Henry Bate, who in 1781 took the name of Dudley, and was afterwards made a canon and a baronet; a bruising, muscular clergyman of the old school, who fought duels one moment and wrote "slashing" articles on every subject, "human and divine," the next. He was well known as a theatrical censor and critic of considerable acumen. We know him by Gainsborough's portrait, standing in a garden with his dog. It is said that a political opponent remarked that the man wanted "execution" and the dog "hanging." We find Garrick continually sending him on theatrical errands. We give the letters he wrote about Mrs. Siddons very nearly in their entirety, on account of their characteristic quaint humour and shrewd power of observation; and also because they to a certain degree exonerate Garrick from some of the charges brought against him by Mrs. Siddons:—

My Dear Friend,

After combatting the various difficulties of one of the cussidest cross-roads in this kingdom, we arrived safe at Cheltenham on Thursday last, and saw the theatrical heroine of that place in the character of Rosalind. Though I beheld her from the side wing of the stage (a barn about three yards over), and consequently under almost every disadvantage, I own she made so strong an impression upon me, that I think she cannot fail to be a valuable acquisition to Drury Lane. Her figure must be remarkably fine, although marred for the present. Her face (if I could judge from where I saw it) is one of the most strikingly beautiful for stage effect that I ever beheld, but I shall surprise you more when I assure you that these are nothing to her action and general stage deportment, which are remarkably pleasing and characteristic; in short, I know no woman who marks the different passages and transitions with so much variety, and at the same time propriety of expression. In the latter humbug scene with Orlando previous to her revealing herself, she did more with it than anyone I ever saw, not even your divine Mrs. Barry excepted. It is

necessary after this panegyric, however, to inform you that her voice struck me at first as rather dissonant, and I fancy, from the private conversation I had with her, that in impassioned scenes it must be somewhat grating; however, as I found it wear away as the business became more interesting, I am inclined to think it only an error of affectation, which may be corrected, if not totally removed. She informed me she has been upon the stage from her cradle. This, though it surprised me, gave me the highest opinion of her judgment, to find she had contracted no strolling habits, which have so often been the bane of many a theatrical genius. She will most certainly be of great use to you, at all events, on account of the great number of characters she plays, all of which, I will venture to assert, she fills with propriety, though I have yet seen her but in one. She is, as you have been informed, a very good breeches figure, and plays in *Widow Brady*, I am informed, admirably. I should not wonder, from her ease, figure, and manner, if she made the *proudest* she of either house tremble in genteel comedy—nay, beware yourself, *Great Little Man*, for she plays Hamlet to the satisfaction of the Worcestershire critics.

The moment the play was over I wrote a note to her husband (who is a damned rascally player, though seemingly a very civil fellow) requesting an interview with him and his wife, intimating at the same time the nature of my business. You will not blame me for making this forced march in your favour, as I learnt that some of the Covent Garden Mohawks were intrenched near the place and intended carrying her by surprise. At the conclusion of the farce they waited upon me, and, after I had opened my commission, she expressed herself happy at the opportunity of being brought out under your eye, but declined proposing any terms, leaving it entirely with you to reward her as you thought proper.

You will perceive that at present she has all that diffidence usually the first attendant on merit; how soon the force of Drury Lane examples, added to the rising vanity of a stage heroine, may transform her, I cannot say. It happens very luckily that the company comes to Worcester for the race week, when I shall take every opportunity of seeing her, and if I find the least reason to alter my opinion (perhaps too hastily formed), you shall immediately have my recantation. My wife, whose judgment in theatrical matters I have a high opinion of, joins with me in these sentiments respecting her merit. I should have wrote to you before, but no post went out from anywhere near here but this night's.

I shall expect to hear from you by return of the post, as Siddons will call upon me to know whether you look upon her as engaged.

My wife joins me in respects to Mrs. Garrick and yourself. I remain, my dear Sir (after writing a damned jargon, I suppose, of unintelligible stuff in haste),

Ever yours most truly,

H. BATE.

Worcester, 12th August, 1775.

P.S.—Direct to me at the "Hop Pole."

To David Garrick, Esq., Adelphi, London.

MY DEAR FRIEND, Worcester, Aug. 19th, 1775.

I received your very friendly letter, and take the first post from hence to answer it. I found it unnecessary to make the intimation you desired to the *husband*, since he requires only to be employed in any manner you shall think proper; and as he is much more tolerable than I thought him at first, it may be no very difficult matter to station him so as to satisfy the man, without burdening the property. I saw him the other evening in Young Marlow in Goldsmith's Comedy, and then he was far from despicable; neither his figure nor face contemptible. A jealousy prevailing through the theatre, upon a suspicion of their leaving them, the acting manager seems determined that I shall not see her again in any character wherein she might give me a second display of her theatrical powers. I am resolved, however, to continue the siege till they give her something capital, knowing *that* must speedily be the case, or the garrison must fall by famine.

She has already gone *six months*, so that pretty early in December she will be fit for service; as you certainly mean to open the ensuing campaign, by charging in person at the head of your lines, I conceive she will come at a very favourable crisis to take a second command, when the retreat from the field may be politically necessary. I am strongly for her first appearance in *Rosalind*; but you may judge better, perhaps, after a perusal of the list on the other side; the characters marked under [in *italics*] are those which she prefers to others:—

Jane Shore.	Juliet.	Violante.
Alicia.	Cordelia.	*Rosalind.*
Roxana.	Horatia.	Mrs. Strickland.
Grecian Daughter.	Imogen.	Clarinda.
Matilda.	Marianne.	Miss Aubrey.
Belvidera.	*Lady Townley.*	Charlotte.
Calista.	*Portia.*	*Widow Brady.*
Monimia.	Mrs. Belville.	

You are certainly right respecting a memorandum between you; the moment, therefore, I receive one from you, it shall be conveyed to them at Cheltenham, where they return next week, and they have promised to return me an answer immediately at Birmingham, for which place I shall set off the instant I have received your letter in any way to town, in order to conclude this business finally, and to the satisfaction of all parties. I am desired to request your answer to the three following particulars:—

1st. As they are ready to attend your summons at any time, Whether they are not to be allowed something to subsist upon when they come to town previous to her appearance?

2nd. Whether you have any objection to employ him in any situation in which you may think him likely "to be useful"?

3rd. When you chuse they should attend you?

As to the first, without you are inclined to have them at the opening of the house, perhaps her remaining in the country, in their own company, where they do very well, may ease you of some expense; but of this you must be the best judge. With respect to him, I think you can have no objection to take him upon the terms he proposes himself. I forgot to tell you that Mrs. Siddons is about twenty years of age. It would be unjust not to remark one circumstance in favour of them both; I mean the universal good character they have preserved here for many years, on account of their public as well as private conduct in life. I beg you to be very particular in your answer to the three queries, and likewise expressly to mention the time you wish to see them, that they may arrange their little matters accordingly.

In a *postscript* he adds:—

She is the most extraordinary quick study I ever heard of. This cannot be amiss, for, if I recollect right, we have a sufficient number of the *leaden-headed* ones at D. Lane already.

Then come letters from Siddons, in answer to some from Bate, concluding an engagement. We can see the trembling anxiety of the young couple. "They were in much concern," he says, "at not hearing sooner," as from the line he had shown him in Mr. Garrick's handwriting, he had been sure of Mrs. Siddons's engagement. They had, in consequence, given his partners in management at Cheltenham notice of

his intention to go; if anything had happened, therefore, to prevent their engagement, it would have "proved a very unlucky circumstance." He then touches on a very necessary point—their pressing need of money to tide them over Mrs. Siddons's expected confinement. "Mr. Garrick," he says, "has conferred an eternal obligation by his kind offer of the cash."

In his next letter, dated Gloucester, November 9th, 1775, he writes:—"From my former accounts of Mrs. Siddons's time, you 'l be surprised when I tell you she is brought to bed; she was unexpectedly taken ill when performing on the stage, and early the next morning produc'd me a fine girl. They are both, thank Heaven, likely to do well; but I am afraid, Sir, notwithstanding this, I shan't be able to leave this much sooner than the time I last mentioned." He then alludes to twenty pounds borrowed in Garrick's name to meet pressing demands.

This "fine girl" was Mrs. Siddons' daughter Sarah, whose premature death later nearly broke her mother's heart.

CHAPTER III.

"DAVEY."

"HAVE you ever heard," asked Garrick, in an unpublished letter to Moody, then at Liverpool, "of a woman Siddons, who is strolling about somewhere near you?" Four months later, by the help of the Rev. Henry Bate's favourable report of her powers, she made her first appearance at Drury Lane. The Golden Gates of the Temple of Fame were thrown open. The young priestess had but to enter, one would have thought, and light the sacred flame; but genius is not to be bound by expediency or opportunity.

It was in 1775, the year when Garrick gave up the management, that Mrs. Siddons appeared on the boards of Drury Lane. She had reached the highest point of her ambition—she was to act with the greatest actor of his time before a dramatic audience rendered fastidious and critical by great traditions.

This was the most unfortunate portion of her life to recount. Failure and disappointment attended every step she made; and this failure and disappointment, although it did not in the least discourage her in

the prosecution of her art, hurried her into bitterness and an unjust feeling of rancour against Garrick, which an examination of the circumstances of the case in no way warrants. One of the Kemble weaknesses was a proud sensitiveness to anything like slight or neglect, and these slights were as often as not phantoms of their own imaginations.

It gives one a mournful sense of injustice to see the charge of jealousy she openly brings repeated by the earlier biographer who wrote about her—when we, who have fuller light thrown upon the great actor's life by the publication of his correspondence, know how free he was from the besetting sins of his craft. To be popular, a man must have the faults of those among whom he is placed. Garrick was called stingy because he did not throw away his money like his colleagues; stiff, because he was a moral man amidst a laxity of manners that has become proverbial; jealous, because he placed the honour of his art and his theatre above personal considerations. He was an object of envy because of his unparalleled success. The two clouds which veiled the nobility of his character—love of money and love of fine friends—vanished like mists in the sunshine if he were really called upon to help a case of distress or take notice of an old friend. These faults were harped upon, however, by Johnson, Foote, and hosts of others. Well might Garrick, in the evening of his days, sitting on the terrace of his house at Twickenham, make the, for him, bitter observation, "I have not always met gratitude in a play-house."

It was at the time, no doubt, a salve to Mrs. Siddons's disappointment to listen to the specious Mr. Sheridan's insinuation of Garrick's jealousy; but it is a curious fact, if Sheridan were sincere in his statements, that

when he succeeded Garrick as manager he never endeavoured to re-engage her; indeed, on the contrary, abruptly and discourteously closed all negotiations and cancelled all agreements made both with the actress and her husband for a reappearance at Drury Lane.

We will allow the reader, however, to judge the story upon its own merits.

After the favourable reports of King and Bate, Garrick, as we have seen by the Bate letters, engaged Mrs. Siddons and her husband. The energy that afterwards distinguished her to such an extraordinary extent was now exhibited.

Although not at all strong—her eldest girl, and second child, as we have seen, having only been born on the 5th of November 1775—in the beginning of December she began making preparations for her journey to London, no joke in those days when, "starting two hours before day, or as late at night," it took three days to reach Bristol.

Five days, Mrs. Delaney tells us, travelling over the same road the Siddons had now to face, it took to reach her father's place in Gloucestershire. "Every half hour flop we went into a slough, not overturned, but stuck. Out we were hauled, and the coach with much difficulty was set up again."

Full of hope and excitement, however, the young actress, accompanied by husband and babies, prepared for their expedition. No pilgrim approaching the shrine of Mecca was ever more enthusiastic than she approaching the bourne of all actors of that day, Drury Lane. Yet already, through all her delight, we hear a note of dissatisfaction that is displeasing. Garrick had arranged to give her five pounds a week, a

munificent salary for a beginner in those days. Mrs. Abington and Mrs. Yates only received ten. She had heard the charge of stinginess made against him, and, parrot-like, repeated it, without really considering if in her own case it were true.

We will relate the story, however, in her own words, taken from Recollections written many years after, but full of as much bitterness as though penned while still smarting under her reverse.

"Happy to be placed where I presumptuously augured that I should do all that I have since achieved, if I could but once gain the opportunity, I instantly paid my respects to the great man. I was at that time good-looking; and certainly, all things considered, an actress well worth my poor five pounds a week. His praises were most liberally conferred upon me." We are told by Campbell that he complimented her in this interview for not having the regular "tie-tum-tie" or sing-song of the provincial actress. "But," she goes on, "his attentions, great and unremitting as they were, ended in worse than nothing. How was all this admiration to be accounted for consistently with his subsequent conduct? Why, thus, I believe: he was retiring from the management of Drury Lane, and, I suppose, at that time wished to wash his hands of all its concerns and details. However this may be, he always objected to my appearance in any very prominent character, telling me that Mrs. Yates and Miss Young would poison me if I did. I, of course, thought him not only an oracle but my friend; and, in consequence of his advice, Portia, in the *Merchant of Venice*, was fixed upon for my *début*, a character in which it was not likely that I should excite any great sensation. *I was, therefore, merely tolerated.*"

We here beg to mention that it can hardly be correct that Mrs. Siddons thought she would make no impression in Portia, as she had underlined Portia in the list she gave Mr. Bate of her favourite parts, and we find her choosing it later as the character in which to appear before Horace Walpole when desirous of propitiating the pitiless critic. But we will continue to relate the unfortunate story of this period in her own words.

"The fulsome adulation that courted Garrick in the theatre cannot be imagined; and whosoever was the luckless wight who should be honoured by his distinguished and envied smiles, of course, became an object of spite and malevolence. Little did I imagine that I myself was now that wretched victim. He would sometimes hand me from my own seat in the green-room to place me next to his own. . . . . He also," she goes on, "selected me to personate Venus at the revival of the *Jubilee*. This gained me the malicious appellation of Garrick's 'Venus,' and the ladies who so kindly bestowed it on me rushed before me in the last scene, so that if he (Mr. Garrick) had not brought us forward with him with his own hands, my little Cupid and myself, whose appointed situations were in the very front of the stage, might have as well been in the Island of Paphos at that moment."

Thomas Dibdin, the Cupid on this occasion, afterwards told Campbell that, as it was necessary for him to smile in the part of his godship, Mrs. Siddons kept him in good humour by asking him what sort of sugar-plums he liked best, and promising him a large supply of them. After the performance she kept her word. This is a characteristic trait; most young actresses under the circumstances would have been rather occu-

pied with the effect of their own beauty on the audience than of the smiles of their Cupids.

At last the day came on which her fate was to be decided. It fell in Christmas week, 1775, and the audience present is described as "numerous and splendid."

The following is a copy of the play-bill:—

(Not acted these two years.)
By Her Majesty's Company at the Theatre Royal in Drury Lane.
This day will be performed
THE MERCHANT OF VENICE.

Shylock . . Mr. KING. Antonio . . Mr. REDDISH.
Gratiano . . Mr. DODD.
Lorenzo (with songs) . . Mr. VERNON.
&c. &c.
Then Jessica (with a song) . . Miss JARRETT.
Nerissa . . Mrs. DAVIES.
Portia, by a Young Lady (her first appearance).

The result can best be known by the judgment of the newspaper critics. One says: "On before us tottered rather than walked a very pretty, delicate, fragile-looking young creature, dressed in a most unbecoming manner, in a faded salmon-coloured sack and coat, and uncertain whereabouts to fix either her eyes or her feet. She spoke in broken, tremulous tones; and at the close of each sentence her voice sank into a 'horrid whisper' that was almost inaudible. After her first exit, the judgment of the pit was unanimous as to her beauty, but declared her awkward and provincial."

In the famous Trial scene she regained her courage, and delivered the great speech to Shylock with "critical propriety," but with a faintness of utterance which seemed the result of physical weakness rather than of want of spirit or feeling. Another paper, who

"understood that the new Portia had been the heroine of one of those petty parties of travelling comedians which wander over the country," owned that she had a fine stage-figure; her features were expressive; she was uncommonly graceful; but her voice was deficient in variety of tone and clearness. This, however, might be the effect of a cold or nervousness. Her words were delivered with good sense and taste, only there was no fire or spirit in the performance. "Nothing," the critic ends, "is so barren of either profit or fame as a cold correctness."

Knowing the Kemble failing of over-study and self-restraint, this seems a fair enough criticism. She represented Portia again a few nights later, but her name did not appear on the bills. She showed more confidence, and succeeded a little better, but does not seem to have got a hold of her audience.

Garrick was at this time employed in mounting an abridgment by Colman of Ben Jonson's *Epicæne*, and trusting, we conclude, to the statement of his friend Mr. Bate, that the *débutante* had "a very good breeches-figure," he selected her for the heroine's part. The result was a failure. Critics complained of "the confusion, when Mrs. Siddons, disguised in the piece as a woman, revealed herself at the end as a boy." The *Morning Post*, edited by Parson Bate, was the only paper that spoke in favour of the attempt.

The next part she was put into was by this same Bate, *The Blackamoor White-washed*. We can see how Garrick was forced by the exigencies of his obligations to Bate to put this play on the stage; the only mistake he made was in subjecting the young actress to the risks and chances of the first representation, which, in consequence of the slashing pen and vigorous

fists of its author, was not likely to be received with unalloyed approbation. Unfortunately he did not understand the proud timidity of the girl on whom he had laid the task. His other ladies did not mind a rebuff, and would do anything for a critic who praised them, as Mr. Bate had praised "Portia." As to a theatrical riot, they rather enjoyed it than otherwise, if it were not turned against them personally. Though treated to many a one afterwards, Mrs. Siddons never forgot this first experience. A band of prize-fighters, supposed to be supporters of the parson's, burst into the pit, and, striking out right and left, silenced the would-be detractors of the play. On the next night both sides mustered in force, and the scene defied description. Officers in the boxes fought with gentlemen from the pit and galleries. The ladies were driven from the boxes, leaving them in possession of the combatants. Garrick, who appeared to try and appease the mob, had an orange flung at him, and a lighted candle passed close to King, who came from the author to announce the withdrawal of the piece. Even this statement had not the effect of restoring quiet until past midnight, when, weary with their exertions, the rioters dispersed. Next day all the papers abused the Julia of the piece, who had not been allowed a chance of making herself heard. "Mrs. Siddons, having no comedy in her nature," one said, "rendered that ridiculous which the author evidently intended to be pleasant."

On the 15th of February, Garrick again allowed her to appear; this time in Mrs. Cowley's *Runaway*—a slight but telling part, which caused one of her critics to say that she dropped into the walking gentlewoman, and was not permitted a long walk before she became

the "Runaway." Garrick then paid her the compliment of entrusting her with the acting of Mrs. Strickland to his Ranger in the old comedy of *The Suspicious Husband.* One lady confesses to being moved to tears by Mrs. Siddons in this part, but the majority of the audience and the newspapers seem to have passed her over in complete silence.

Garrick now began his farewell performances. He selected her to act the Lady Anne to his Richard III.—a selection which was an honour coveted by most of the ladies of the company. The actor surpassed his finest days; the young actress was almost petrified by the ferocity and fire of his gaze. She forgot, in her flurry, his important order that she should stand so that *his* face might be presented to the audience. The look she received made her almost faint with terror, and no doubt betrayed her fright in her acting. The critics pronounced that she was "lamentable," and the public were utterly indifferent. This was her last appearance. And so ended her first disastrous season at Drury Lane. We think every unbiassed person in reading the account of it will entirely absolve Garrick of the charges brought against him. Other causes were at work which the offended actress did not take into consideration.

Garrick could not forgive crudeness, want of finish. He himself had stepped on the London stage with as much natural ease, and in his representation of Richard III. had taken the town as completely by storm the first time as the last time he acted it. He never made allowances for timidity, and grew impatient at want of confidence. We know he utterly despaired of Mrs. Graham, afterwards the great Mrs. Yates, when he first saw her in the part of Marcia; and Miss

Barton, afterwards Mrs. Abington, he allowed to leave Drury Lane at first because he could not, he said, give her a fitting part. The Kemble genius, on the other hand, was a plant of tardy growth, needing much cultivation and many years to bring it to perfection.

Garrick was above all a manager who had the honour of his theatre at heart. He had held the helm at Drury Lane for years, guiding the fortunes of the company through stormy waters safely into the haven of financial and artistic success such as no theatre had ever enjoyed before; but at what a cost! Tormented by the jealousies, insolence, and greed of his leading ladies, disheartened by the envy and treachery of his oldest friends, he must have been glad to contemplate retirement from the turmoil, to enjoy undisturbed the competency he had been able to save from a long life spent in the service of his art and the public. He had but one year more of thraldom, but the harness had begun to gall almost beyond endurance. When he came home ill and worn out after protracted rehearsals, he found petulant letters to be answered, when he went back to the theatre hostile attacks to be avoided, while outside were ranged secret and declared foes, jealous of his success, anxious to find a flaw in his honour or his genius. Suddenly he bethought him of a method, tried before with success, to curb the fiery tempers of the ladies within "his kingdom." He had heard of a lovely young actress, member of a company strolling in the provinces. He determined to engage her and use her as a foil against the rebellious members of his female staff, for the last year of office. It was not likely that, coming from humble surroundings and hard work, she would afflict him with many airs and graces; and

before time had been given her to spoil, his term as manager would have ceased. Garrick had never been given much cause to think highly of women during his long life as an actor — his own wife always excepted—and he most likely put Sarah Siddons on the same level as the others—sordid, like Miss Pope; jealous, like Mrs. Yates; or ill-tempered, like Mrs. Clive—well able to take care of herself, and not gifted with those two rare qualities amongst theatrical ladies, modesty or sensitiveness. How could he guess, even with all his perspicacity and experience, that this young creature—whose life hitherto had been spent strolling from place to place with the vagabonds and adventurers her profession threw her with—was proud, sensitive, timid, nourishing the very highest ideal of her art, and indifferent to any homage given to her person and not to her intellectual power of interpreting the works of the great poets of her country? How could he tell that beneath the pretty exterior of this young and trembling recruit lay hidden the fiery soul of the majestic, terrific Lady Macbeth? He treated her with an amount of consideration and courtesy unusual even with him, sending her boxes for all his great performances, when Cabinet Ministers were imploring places and had to be refused. He would hand her from the green-room and put her in the place of honour beside him; and gave her parts which according to his judgment, formed hastily on what he had had an opportunity of seeing, best suited her. And how was he rewarded? By a resentment nourished the whole of a lifetime, and by a charge persistently stated and repeated by her friends, that the great "Roscius" was jealous of an unskilled, untrained, country actress! Why, then, had he not shown jealousy

of Mrs. Abington, Mrs. Clive, or, still more, of the gentlemen of his company, Barry and Smith, the Romeo and Charles Surface of their day. There are so few figures in public life complete and admirable as David Garrick's, so far removed above the pettiness and egotism accompanying success, that it is with pain we read Mrs. Siddons's accusations, and think the only way to excuse her is to show the anguish experienced by both her husband and herself in the miserable sequel to the sad story of failure and disappointment, and to ascribe her injustice to the misery of lives embittered and prospects blighted, for the time, making her ever afterwards see the facts of the case through a distorted medium. We will relate in her own words what now took place :—

"He (Garrick) promised Mr. Siddons to procure me a good engagement with the new managers, and desired him to give himself no trouble about the matter, but to put my cause entirely into his hands. He let me down, however, after all these protestations, in the most humiliating manner, and, instead of doing me common justice with those gentlemen, rather depreciated my talents. This Mr. Sheridan afterwards told me; and said that when Mrs. Abington heard of my impending dismissal, she told them they were all acting like fools. When the London season was over, I made an engagement at Birmingham for the ensuing summer, little doubting of my return to Drury Lane for the next winter; but, whilst I was fulfilling my engagement at Birmingham, to my utter dismay and astonishment, I received an official letter from the prompter of Drury Lane, acquainting me that my services would be no longer required. It was a stunning and cruel blow, overwhelming all my ambi-

tious hopes, and involving peril even to the subsistence of my helpless babes. It was very near destroying me. My blighted prospects, indeed, induced a state of mind that preyed upon my health, and for a year and a half I was supposed to be hastening to a decline. For the sake of my poor children, however, I roused myself to shake off this despondency, and my endeavours were blest with success, *in spite of the degradation I had suffered in being banished from Drury Lane as a worthless candidate for fame and fortune.*"

Siddons wrote piteously to Garrick on the 9th of February 1776, soliciting his "friendship" and "endeavour" for their continuance in Drury Lane. "I account we have been doubly unfortunate at our onset in the theatre, first that particular circumstances prevented us from joining it at a proper time, and thereby rendered it impossible for us to be mingled in the business of the season, where our utility might have been more observed; second, that we are going to be deprived of you as manager, and left to those who, perhaps, may not have an opportunity this winter of observing us at all: these considerations, Sir, have occasioned this address, with hopes you will lay them before Mr. Lacy and those gentlemen your successors; and as there has been no agreement with regard to salary between you and us, it may now be necessary to propose that article, thereby to acquaint them with what we shall expect, which (as we are so young in the theatre) is no more than what we can decently subsist on and appear with some credit to the profession. That is, for Mrs. Siddons three pounds a week, for myself two; this, I flatter myself, we shall both be found worthy of for the first

year; after that (as it may be presumed we shall be more experienced in our business) shall wish to rise as our merits may demand. I am, Sir, with many apologies for this freedom, your most obedient and very humble servant, WM. SIDDONS."

It shows how disastrous the effect of her acting must have been that, in spite of the smallness of their demands, Lacy, Sheridan & Co. refused to entertain their proposal.

It is a curious fact, if, as she says, the treatment she received at Garrick's hands was unjust, that at this juncture the managers of the rival theatre of Covent Garden, who had already been in treaty with her, and thought themselves unhandsomely dealt with when Garrick secured her, did not come forward now. It is clear that the anxiety of the Covent Garden managers for her assistance was extinguished by her performance; those talents which they were ready before her appearance to contest with Garrick, they subsequently resigned without an effort to the obscurity of a strolling company. We have a curious corollary to her statement, "that Mrs. Abington told them they were all acting like fools," in the lately published Memoirs of Crabbe Robinson, in which he relates a conversation he held in 1811 with Mrs. Abington on the subject of Mrs. Siddons. She was by no means warm, he says, in her praise. She objected to the elaborate emphasis given to very insignificant words. "That was brought in by them," she added, with truth, alluding to the weakness of the family. Perhaps the fair Abington's praise at first was as conclusive a sign of failure as Sheridan's dismissal.

Good-natured Pivey Clive was more honest in saying nothing at the time; but on going with Mrs. Garrick

to see her later, when she was in the heyday of her success, she pronounced the young actress, in her own characteristic fashion, to be "all truth and daylight."

We never hear Garrick's name mentioned again with hers, except in a note in connection with two folio Shakespeares of 1623. "In 1776," Payne Collier says, "Garrick had presented the volume (one of the folio copies with the autographs of David Garrick and Sarah Siddons) to Mrs. Siddons as a testimony of her merits, and of his obligation." So far Payne Collier. Another writer, commenting on this note, demonstrates that it is not likely that Garrick presented so great a treasure as the folio Shakespeare of 1623 to Mrs. Siddons, especially as the words "a testimony of her merits and his obligation" was an addition of Payne Collier. He then relates the circumstances of her first appearance. Garrick, he says, amongst other things, noticed some awkward action of her arms, and said "if she waved them about in that fashion she would knock off his wig," upon which she retorted to the person who told her, "He was only afraid I should overshadow his nose." A mutual feeling not likely to lead to such a gift. It would be interesting, therefore, to know through what hands the volume passed from Garrick to Mrs. Siddons, and from Mrs. Siddons to Lilly the bookseller. With the great actor's wife she was afterwards on terms of friendship; and when Mrs. Garrick died, she left her in her will a pair of gloves which were Shakespeare's, "and were presented to my late dear husband by one of the family during the Jubilee at Stratford-on-Avon." And so "Davey" vanishes from her life.

CHAPTER IV.

WORK.

The rebuff she had sustained at Drury Lane called out all that was finest in Mrs. Siddons' nature. The blow had been "stunning and cruel," as she says; but the resolute valiant nature she had inherited from her mother soon reasserted itself. In spite of delicate health, which Wilkinson, who acted with her in *Evander*, feared "might disable her from sustaining the fatigues of duty," we find her moving from place to place, unintermitting in study, attaining a step higher each new representation she essayed, persistently raising her audience to her level, not descending to theirs.

She no longer led the "vagabond" life of her early strolling days, but still one of constant anxiety and unrest. The young actress returned to the provinces with the prestige of having acted with the great Garrick, and of having even excited the jealousy of "Roscius" by her dramatic power—a report industriously circulated by her friends and managers, and, no doubt, confirmed by the actress herself. So unconsciously does self-interest colour our opinions.

In saying that she no longer led the "vagabond" life of her early days, we mean that instead of wandering, as strolling players were obliged to do, from town to town, trusting to the chances of the hour, pitching their tent in a barn or an inn, and trusting to the caprice and humours of the public officials of the places they came to, she now secured fixed engagements at the best provincial theatres, which, owing to the difficulties and expenses of a journey to London, were attended during the season by many of the county magnates, and the lesser stars following and surrounding the brighter planets.

Bath stood at the head of these provincial theatres. York, Hull, Manchester, Hereford, Liverpool, Worcester, and many others came next in order of merit.

The first engagement she received on quitting Drury Lane was at Birmingham, where she remained the whole summer of 1776, acting parts of the highest standing. Here she enjoyed the privilege of having Henderson as coadjutor, who, Campbell tells us, was so struck by her merits, that he wrote immediately to Palmer, the manager of the Bath Theatre, urging him in the strongest terms to engage her. Palmer was unable to follow this advice just then, but did so later.

The only direct communication we have from her during this time of work and struggle is a letter to Mrs. Inchbald, whose friendship with the Kembles had begun in 1776. Charges were, indeed, "tremendous circumstances" to her who, at the best of times in those early days, only enjoyed a salary of three pounds a week. Her observations about "exotics" are amusing, she herself figuring so largely later in that character, to the dread of all provincial actresses :—

"I played *Hamlet* in Liverpool, to near a hundred

pounds, and wish I had taken it to myself; but the fear of charges, which, you know, are most tremendous circumstances, persuaded me to take part of a benefit with Barry, for which I have since been very much blamed; but he, I believe, was very much satisfied—and, in short, so am I. Strange resolutions are formed in our theatrical ministry; one of them I think very prudent—this little rogue Harry is chattering to such a degree, I scarce know what I am about. [Her eldest boy was then four.] But to proceed: Our managers have determined to employ no more exotics; they have found that Miss Yonge's late visit to us (which you must have heard of) has rather hurt than done them service; so that Liverpool must, from this time forth, be content with such homely fare as we small folks can furnish to its delicate sense. . . . . Present our kind compliments to Mr. and Mrs. Wilkinson, and tell the former I never mention his name but I wish to be regaling with him over a pinch of his most excellent Irish snuff, which I have never had a snift of but in idea since I left York." It is difficult to conceive the divine Melpomene taking snuff, though she did so all her life; but in that day it was the fashion for everyone to snuff.

Early in 1777 she played at Manchester, where she made so great an impression that the shrewd and enterprising Tate Wilkinson, lessee of the York Theatre, offered her an engagement. Her range of characters now included "the Grecian Daughter," Alicia, Jane Shore, Matilda, Lady Townley—all the tearful dramas of the day, which the young actress brought into fashion instead of the artificial comedy of the preceding age. At Manchester, we are astonished to hear, one of her most applauded characters was *Hamlet*.

Her playing this great play in strolling days, as Mr. Bate tells us, "was most likely only a girlish freak." Her acting now shows that she was cultivating her dramatic genius in every direction, working out of the restricted domain of Jane Shore, the Grecian Daughter, and Calista, no longer content to move her audience by her pathos and grace, but determined to bring them to her feet by her intellectual power. It is curious that, though many years afterwards she acted it in Dublin, she never could be persuaded to appear in it in London. Her dislike to anything approaching male attire was almost morbid, and even in Rosalind she vastly amused the town by her costume—"mysterious nondescript garments," that were neither male nor female, devised to satisfy a prudery which in such a character was wholly out of place.

At York, where Mrs. Siddons acted for Tate Wilkinson, the manager, from Easter to Whitsuntide 1777, she enjoyed an unequivocal success. "All lifted up their eyes with astonishment that such a voice, such a judgment, and such acting, should have been neglected by a London audience, and by the first actor in the world!"—another hit at Garrick made by Wilkinson, who, generously aided by Garrick at the beginning of his career, had turned against his benefactor, and never missed an opportunity of detracting from his merits.

The most critical local censors were lavish in their praise, though all remarked "how ill and pale she was, and wondered how she got through her parts." She acted the round of her characters. Her attitudes and figure were vastly admired; she was thought "so elegant." Wilkinson endeavoured to secure her permanently as a member of his company, and in his

Memoirs tells how he endeavoured to tempt her by fine clothes, providing for one of her parts a most "elegant sack-back, all over silver trimmings." He did not understand any more than Garrick the nature of the woman with whom he had to deal. On the 17th May she acted Semiramis for her benefit, and the York season closed. Palmer, of the Bath Theatre, had not forgotten Henderson's strong recommendation, and, finding at last an opening, he concluded an engagement with her.

Bath was first in importance among the provincial theatres. The audience, indeed, was very largely composed of the London "fashionables," who came to drink the waters; no "sack-backs," therefore, "all over silver trimmings," were allowed to interfere with her determination, for, although in her petulant moments she was wont to declare that she preferred the country, and had been treated so cruelly in London she never would play there again, in her heart she was resolved to rule supreme on those boards she had once trod with Garrick.

"I now made an engagement at Bath," she says in her *Memoranda*. "There my talents and industry were encouraged by the greatest indulgence, and, I may say, with some admiration. Tragedies which had been almost banished, again resumed their proper interest; but still I had the mortification of being obliged to personate many subordinate characters in comedy, the first being, by contract, in the possession of another lady. To this I was obliged to submit, or to forfeit a portion of my salary, *which was only three pounds a week*. Tragedies were now becoming more and more fashionable. This was favourable to my cast of powers; and, whilst I laboured hard, I began

to earn a distinct and flattering reputation. Hard labour, indeed, it was! for, after the rehearsal at Bath, and on a Monday morning, I had to go and act at Bristol on the evening of the same day, and reaching Bath again, after a drive of twelve miles, I was obliged to represent some fatiguing part there on the Tuesday evening. When I recollect all this labour of mind and body, I wonder that I had strength and courage to support it, interrupted as I was by the care of a mother, and by the childish sports of my little ones, who were often most unwillingly hushed to silence for interrupting their mother's studies."

From the pages of Horace Walpole, Mrs. Montagu, and Fanny Burney, we can bring the Pan-tiles of Tunbridge Wells or the parade at Bath, with their periwigs, powder-patches, and scandal, distinctly before us. Let us stand for a moment on the parade, and watch the noteworthy people, muses, poets, statesmen, who have assembled there, in 1778, to drink the water. Royal dukes and princesses might be seen sauntering about, playing whist and E. O. in the evening, and taking "three glasses of water, a toasted roll, a Bath cake, and a cold walk in the mornings." Next to them, the celebrated Duchess of Devonshire, loveliest of the lovely, gayest of the gay, attracts most notice. Her dazzling beauty, and those eyes the Irish labourer at the Fox Election said he could light his pipe at, are said to have taken away the readiness of hand and happiness of touch of the young painter "reported to have some talent," named Gainsborough, while painting her this year at Bath.

After the Queen of Beauty comes the Queen of the Blues, Mrs. Montagu, "brilliant in clothes, solid in

judgment, critical in talk, with the air and manner of a woman accustomed to being distinguished and of great parts." She writes in her letters of hating "ye higgledy-piggledy of the watering-places," but seems happy enough combating for precedence "with the only other candidate for colloquial eminence" she thought worthy to be her peer—short, plump, brisk Mrs. Thale; on the one side a placid, high-strained intellectual exertion, on the other an exuberant pleasantry, without the smallest malice in either. All the "Johnsonhood," as Horace Walpole calls the circle, musters round the two brilliant ladies, the Great Bear in the centre, for he and Boswell are stopping at the Pelican Inn. The conversation turns on *Evelina*, the universal topic of the day; Johnson declaring he had sat up all night to read it, much to Fanny Burney's delight, who, thirsting for flattery, sits with observant eyes and sarcastic little mouth, that belies the prudishly-folded hands and prim air. Moving about from group to group is the brilliant Sheridan, walking with his father and wife, and surrounded by the Linley family, to whom the lovely Cecilia is recounting the honours heaped on them in London.

Unnoticed among all these great people is a little lame Scottish boy, destined to be the greatest of them all. Mrs. Siddons most likely saw and knew the little fellow then, who afterwards became so true a friend, for Walter Scott, in his autobiography, tells us he was frequently taken to Bath for his lameness, and, after he had bathed in the morning, got through a reading-lesson at the old dame's near the parade, and had had a drive over the downs, his uncle would sometimes take him to the old theatre. On one occasion, witnessing *As You Like It*, his interest was so great that, in the

middle of the wrestling scene in the first act, he screamed out, "A'n't they brothers?"

Amongst this "higgledy-piggledy," we are suddenly struck by a beautiful young creature, whose arrival seems to cause a flutter among the fashionables. She is accompanied by a handsome fair man and two beautiful children. This is the new actress who is turning every head. From Lawrence's coloured crayon drawing, done of her during this stay at Bath, we can form a distinct idea of what she was like. He has drawn her three-quarter face, black velvet hat and plume, white muslin cavalier tie, brown riding spencer with big buttons and lappels turned back. Under the shadow of the hat is the refined, noble face, with delicate, arched eyebrows, aquiline nose, finely modelled mouth, and round cleft chin. She is not yet the tragic muse of Reynolds, nor the full-orbed, fashionable beauty of Gainsborough, but a lovely young Diana, with frank, large, out-looking eyes, and a pretty air of defiance and resolution, the brightness undimmed by the anxiety and hard work of later days; the young beauty is evidently determined to conquer the universe.

It was a world strangely at issue with her own ideas into which she had stepped—a dandified, ceremonious world, full of witty and wicked ladies and gentlemen, who played cards and backed horses; but, mercifully for her, a world at the same time full of childish enthusiasm, an age of pallor and fainting and hysterics. Grown men and women sitting up at night weeping and laughing over the woes and escapades of Clarissa Harlowe and Evelina; ladies writing to Richardson: "Pray, Sir, make Lovelace happy; you can so easily do it. Pray reform him! Will you not save a soul?"

The same vivid interest was taken in dramatic situations. It was a common thing for women—and, indeed, men also—to be carried out fainting; and as to the crying and sobbing, it was generally audible all over the house. In a pathetic piece, Miss Burney describes two young ladies, who sat in a box above her, being both so much shocked at the death of Douglas that "they both burst into a loud fit of roaring, and sobbed on afterwards for almost half the farce." Needless to say, therefore, the enthusiasm a beautiful young actress like Mrs. Siddons would create. It was not, however, immediate; she was obliged, as we have seen, to personate subordinate characters, and was obliged to act in comedy that did not suit her.

Thursdays were the nights of the Cotillon balls at Bath, and of the assemblies at Lady Miller's, of Bath Easton vase celebrity, which are alluded to by Horace Walpole: "They hold a Parnassus fair every Thursday, before the balls, give out rhymes and themes, and all the flux at Bath contend for the prizes. A Roman vase, dressed with pink ribbons and myrtles, receives the poetry, which is drawn out every festival. Six judges of these Olympic games retire and select the brightest compositions, which the respective successful ten candidates acknowledge."

These events always emptied the theatre, and it was one of the young actress's grievances that for a time she was put forward—no doubt owing to the claims of the leading ladies—on these occasions. Gradually, however, her attraction increased, and on various occasions she succeeded in drawing the frequenters of the balls to the theatre. She brought tragedies into fashion, and in *The Mourning Bride*, Juliet, the Queen in

Hamlet, Jane Shore, Isabella, succeeded in gaining the suffrages of her Bath audience.

We find the "tonish" young men, on the occasion of her benefit, presenting her with sixty guineas "in order to secure tickets, as they were afraid the demand for them would be so great by-and-bye." "Was it not elegant?" she asks. One of these benefits produced to her one hundred and forty-six pounds—a handsome sum in those days. Before two years of her four years' stay at Bath had elapsed, we see her the favourite and friend of all the great people in the place. The Duchess of Devonshire showed her particular favour; and subsequently, when her engagement at Drury Lane hung in the balance, threw the weight of her influence, which was supreme, into the scale.

We cannot help remarking, in spite of the accusations so frequently brought against her of her love of fine friends, that those who clustered about her in those early Bath days occupied the same position in her heart thirty years later. One of these, a Dr. Whalley, and his wife, were true and devoted friends all her life, and her letters to him contribute some of the most valuable materials we have for writing her life. Dr. Thomas Sedgwick Whalley was a gentleman of taste and good income, derived from his own private estates, and the rich stipend of an unwholesome Lincolnshire living, which a kind-hearted bishop had given him on condition he never resided on it. He enjoyed some literary celebrity as the author of a long narrative poem, *Edwy and Edilda.* He occupied one of the finest houses on the Crescent; was intimate with Mrs. Piozzi; corresponded with the voluminous letter-writer, Miss Seward; and was, in fact, a fine specimen of the *dilettante* gentleman of the old school.

Little Burney's sharp-pointed pen describes Whalley exactly:

One of the clergymen was Mr. W——, a young man who has a house on the Crescent, and is one of the best supporters of Lady Miller's vase at Bath Easton. He is immensely tall, thin, and handsome, but affected, delicate, and sentimentally pathetic; and his conversation about his own "feelings," about "amiable motives," and about the wind—which, at the Crescent, he said in a tone of dying horror, "blew in a manner really frightful!"—diverted me the whole evening. But Miss Thrale, not content with private diversion, laughed out at his expressions, till I am sure he perceived and understood her merriment.

Later she mentions:—

In the evening we had Mrs. Lambart, who brought us a tale called *Edwy and Edilda*, by the sentimental Mr. Whalley, and unreadably soft and tender and senseless is it.

He was of the soft and tender school; Miss Seward's heart "vibrates to every sentence of his last charming letter"; they indulge in the "communication of responsive ideas"; and on leaving Bath she thus addresses him:—

Edwy, farewell! To Lichfield's darkened grove,
With aching heart and rising sighs, I go.
Yet bear a grateful spirit as I rove,
For all of thine which balm'd a cureless woe.

We cannot tell whether the "communication of responsive ideas" with so many fair ladies aroused Mrs. Whalley's jealousy ultimately, or whether incompatibility of temper was the cause, but in 1819 Mrs. Piozzi writes:—

I hear wondrous tales of Doctor and Mrs. Whalley; half the town saying he is the party aggrieved, and the other half lamenting the lady's fate. Two wiseacres sure, old acquaintances of forty years' standing, and both past seventy years old!

When Mrs. Siddons first knew them at Bath, there

was evidently nothing of that sort. She writes to him from Bristol:—

"I cannot express how much I am honoured by your friendship; therefore you must not expect words, but as much gratitude as can inhabit the bosom of a human being. I hope, with a fervency unusual upon such occasions, that you will not be disappointed in your expectations of me to-night; but sorry am I to say I have often observed that I have performed worst when I most ardently wished to do better than ever. Strange perverseness! And this leads me to observe —as I believe I may have done before—that those who act mechanically are sure to be in some sort right; while we who trust to nature—if we do not happen to be in the humour (which, however, Heaven be praised! seldom happens)—are dull as anything can be imagined, because we cannot feign. But I hope Mrs. Whalley will remember that it was your commendations which she heard, and judge of your praises by the benevolent heart from which they proceed, more than as standards of my deserving. Luckily I have been able to procure places in the front row, next to the stage-box, on the left-hand of you as you go in. These, I hope, will please you."

Meantime, Henderson, who had before so strongly recommended her to the Bath manager, came down for one or two nights and acted Benedict to her Beatrice; returned to London so full of her praises that the managers of Drury Lane made her the offer of an engagement in the summer of 1782. "After my former dismissal from thence," she says later in her *Memoranda*, "it may be imagined that this was to me a triumphant moment."

At the same time, she was loth to leave her appre-

ciative friends at Bath, and, curiously enough, hesitated at the last moment about accepting; so that Whalley's congratulatory poem on her engagement at Drury Lane, contributed to Lady Miller's "Roman Vase," was a little premature. At last, however, her departure was formally announced, and she took her farewell benefit. She acted in the *Distressed Mother* and *The Devil to Pay*, and then came forward and recited some lines *of her own composition*, of which we give the reader only a short sample, as the "Virgin Muse" does not soar very high :—

> Have I not raised some expectation here?
> "Wrote by herself? What! authoress and player?
> True, we have heard her"—thus I guess'd you 'd say—
> "With decency recite another's lay;
> But never heard, nor ever could we dream,
> Herself had sipp'd the Heliconian stream."
> Perhaps you farther said—Excuse me, pray,
> For thus supposing all that you might say—
> "What will she treat of in this same address?
> Is it to show her learning? Can you guess?"
> Here let me answer: No. Far different views
> Possess'd my soul, and fired my virgin Muse.
> 'Twas honest gratitude, at whose request
> Sham'd be the heart that will not do its best!

She then informs them they must part; that, if only she meets as much kindness elsewhere,

> Envy, o'ercome, will hurl her pointless dart,
> And critic gall be shed without its smart.

Nothing would drag her from Bath, she says, but one thing; here she went to the wing and led forward her children :—

> These are the moles that bear me from your side,
> Where I was rooted—where I could have died.

The moles now numbered three, her second daughter

and third child, Maria, having been born on 1st July 1779.

> Stand forth, ye elves! and plead your mother's cause,
> Ye little magnets, whose soft influence draws
> Me from a point where every gentle breeze
> Wafted my bark to happiness and ease—
> Sends me adventurous on a larger main,
> In hopes that you may profit by my gain.
> Have I been hasty? Am I, then, to blame?
> Answer, all ye who own a parent's name!
> Thus have I tired you with an untaught muse,
> Who for your favour still most humbly sues;
> That you for classic learning will receive
> My soul's best wishes, which I freely give—
> For polished periods round, and touched with art,
> The fervent offering of my grateful heart.

So Mrs. Siddons made her bow. When she next appeared at Bath it was as the greatest tragic actress then on the stage.

Towards the end of August, she set out determined to make her way slowly to London, acting at various country theatres as she went along. Her letters written to the Whalleys are full of fun, and show she had the pen of a ready writer.

"You will be pleased to hear," she says, "that Mrs. Carr was very civil to me—gave me a comfortable bed, and I slept very well. We were five of us in the machine, all females but one, a youth of about sixteen, and the most civilized being you can conceive—a native of Bristol, too.

"One of the ladies was, I believe verily, a little insane. Her dress was the most peculiar, and manner the most offensive, I ever remember to have met with; her person was taller and more thin than you can imagine; her hair raven black, drawn as tight as possible over her cushion before and behind; and at the top of her head was placed a solitary fly-cap of the last

century, composed of materials of about twenty sorts, and as dirty as the ground; her neck, which was a thin scrag of a quarter of a yard long, and the colour of a walnut, she wore uncovered, for the solace of all beholders; her Circassian was an olive-coloured cotton of three several sorts, about two breadths wide in the skirt, and tied up exactly in the middle in one place only. She had a black petticoat spotted with red, and over that a very thin white muslin one, with a long black gauze apron, and without the least hoop. I never in my life saw so odd an appearance; and my opinion was not singular, for wherever we stopped she inspired either mirth or amazement, but was quite innocent of it herself. On taking her seat among us at Bristol, she flew into a violent passion on seeing one of the windows down. I said I would put it up, if she pleased. 'To be sure,' said she; 'I have no ambition to catch my death!' No sooner had she done with me, but she began to scold the woman who sat opposite to her for touching her foot. 'You have not been used to riding in a *coach*, I fancy, good woman.' She met in this lady a little more spirit than she found in me, and we were obliged to her for keeping this unhappy woman in tolerable order for the remainder of the day. Bless me! I had almost forgot to tell you that I was desired to make tea at breakfast. Vain were my endeavours to please this strange creature. She had desired to have her tea in a basin, and I followed her directions as near as it was possible in the making her tea; but she had no sooner tasted it than she bounced to the window and threw it out, declaring she had never met with such a set of awkward, ill-bred people. What could be expected in a stage-coach, indeed? She snatched the canister

from me, poured a great quantity into the basin, with sugar, cream, and water, and drank it all together. Did you ever hear of anything so strange? When we sat down to dinner, she seemed terrified to death lest anybody should eat but herself.

The remaining part of our journey was made almost intolerable by her fretfulness. One minute she was screaming out lest the coachman should overturn us; she was sure he would, because she would not give him anything for neglecting to keep her trunk dry; and, though it was immoderately hot, we were obliged very often to sit with the windows up, for she had been told that the air was pestilential after sunset, and that, however people liked it, she did not choose to hazard her life by sitting with the windows open. All were disposed, for the sake of peace, to let her have her own way, except the person whom we were really obliged to for quieting her every now and then. She had been handsome, but was now, I suppose, sixty years old. I pity her temper, and am sorry for her situation, which I have set down as that of a disappointed old maid.

"At about seven o'clock we arrived at Dorchester. On my stepping out of the coach, a gentleman very civilly gave me his hand. Who should it be but Mr. Siddons! who was come on purpose to meet me. He was very well, and the same night I had the pleasure of seeing my dear boy, more benefited by the sea than can be conceived. He desires me to thank Mr. Whalley for the fruit, which he enjoyed very much. We have got a most deplorable lodging, and the water and the bread are intolerable; 'but travellers must be content.' Mr. Whalley was so good as to be interested about my bathing. Is there anything I could

refuse to do at his or your request? I intend to bathe to-morrow morning, cost what pain it will. I expected to have found more company here.

"I went to Dorchester yesterday to dine with Mr. Beach, who is on a visit to a relation, and has been laid up with the gout, but is recovering very fast. He longs to see Langford, and I am anxious to have him see it. I suppose Mr. Whalley has heard when Mr. Pratt comes. [Mr. Pratt was a Bath bookseller who had given her lessons in elocution; and afterwards, when she was not allowed by the manager of Drury Lane to act in his tragedy, declared he would write an ode on Ingratitude and dedicate it to her.] Pray present the kindest wishes of Mr. Siddons, little Harry, and myself. I hope Mr. Whalley will do me the favour to choose the ribbon for my watch-string. I should like it as near the colour of little dear Paphy's ear as possible. I did not very well comprehend what Lady Mary (Knollys) said about the buckles. Will you please to give her my respectful compliments, and say I beg her pardon for having deferred speaking to her on that subject to so awkward a time, but hope my illness the last day I had the honour of seeing her ladyship will be my excuse. I hope I shall be favoured with a line from you, and that her ladyship will explain herself more fully then. Harry has just puzzled me very much. When going to eat some filberts after dinner, I told him you desired he would not eat them; 'But,' says he, 'what would you have done if Mr. Whalley had desired you would?' I was at a stand for a little while, and at last he found a means to save me from my embarrassment by saying, 'But you know Mr. Whalley would not desire you to eat them if he thought

they would hurt you.' 'Very true, Harry,' says I; so it ended there."

The following shows that the engagement with the London manager was not yet completely ratified; she was probably standing out for better terms, which he was not inclined to give.

"I look forward with inexpressible delight to our snug parties, and I have the pleasure to inform you that I shall not go to London this winter. Mr. Linley thinks my making a partial appearance will neither benefit myself nor the proprietors. Mrs. Crawford threatens to leave them very often, he says, but I suppose she knows her own interest better. I should suppose she has a very good fortune, and I should be vastly obliged to her if she would go and live very comfortably upon it. I'll give her leave to stay and be of as much service to my good and dear friend's tragedy as she possibly can, and then let her retire as soon as she pleases. I hope I shall not tire you; Mr. Siddons is afraid I shall, and in compliance to him (who, with me, returns his grateful acknowledgments for all your kindnesses), I conclude with, I hope, an unnecessary assurance, that I am ever your grateful and affectionate servant, S. Siddons.

"P.S.—Please to present our joint compliments to Mr. Whalley, Mrs. Whalley, and Miss Squire, and, in short, the whole circle, not forgetting Mrs. Reeves, to whom I am much obliged. In an especial manner, I beg to be remembered to the cruel beauty, Sappho. She knows her power, and therefore treats me like a little tyrant. Adieu! God for ever bless you and yours! The beach here is the most beautiful I ever saw."

She alludes above to Whalley's tragedy *Morval*,

which was acted later with her as heroine. It was a complete failure, and was only performed three nights.

Mrs. Siddons became fond of Weymouth, and often returned there in after years. Miss Burney, in her *Memoirs*, tells us of being there once on duty with the King and Royal Family. They met the actress, who made a sweeping curtsey, walking on the sands with her children. The King commanded a performance at the theatre, but the Royal Family having gone away on an expedition, did not get back in time, and kept everyone waiting. The King and Queen arriving at last, sent a page home for their wigs, so as not to keep the audience waiting any longer.

CHAPTER V.

SUCCESS.

At last all difficulties were arranged between the manager of Drury Lane and Mrs. Siddons, and the day dawned on which she was again destined to make her bow before a London audience. It was the 10th October 1782. Important changes had taken place in the theatre since the fatal December seven years before. The proud pre-eminence of Drury Lane had passed away; the magic circle of theatrical genius that Garrick kept together by his personal influence had been broken up and dispersed under Sheridan's erratic management. Mrs. Abington, Mrs. Yates, and Miss Young had deserted to other companies. So that the fine selection of plays, ever ready with the same set of players at hand to act them, ensuring a perfection never achieved before, were now mounted without care of thought, and acted by whomever the capricious manager chose to select for the moment. Old trained hands, accustomed to the methodical rule of Garrick, would not submit to be transferred from part to part, receiving no due notice beforehand, and, above all, they would not submit to the irregularity in the money arrangements which had begun almost imme-

diately after the impecunious Irishman took the reins of government. There were hardly any names of note now to be seen on the bills except those of Smith, Palmer, and King, and they openly talked of deserting the sinking ship.

There is something almost heroic, therefore, in the appearance of the young actress on the boards of Drury Lane at this particular juncture. Alone and unaided, against enormous odds, she saved the famous theatre, endeared to every lover of dramatic art, from artistic and financial ruin. She had hitherto proved herself to have indomitable industry and energy, to have all the qualities of a hard-working, painstaking artist; now she was suddenly to flash forth in all the splendour of her genius and power. And yet how simple and womanly she remained. There was no undue reliance on her own gifts, in spite of the indiscriminate praise that had been heaped on her at Bath by too zealous friends. She turned a deaf ear to Miss Seward—"all asterisks and exclamations," and to Dr. Whalley—"all sighs and admiration"; but listened to the wise suggestions of Mr. Linley and of old Sheridan, the father of Richard Brinsley Sheridan, himself a retired actor with full knowledge of the stage and its requirements. She and they were afraid her voice was not equal to filling a large London theatre. "But we soon had reason to think," she tells us, "that the bad construction of the Bath theatre, and not the weakness of my voice was the cause of our mutual fears."

Isabella, in Southerne's pathetic play of *The Fatal Marriage*, was the part Sheridan recommended her to choose for her first appearance, and the selection showed his appreciative knowledge both of her powers

and of the audience she was to act to; the combined tenderness, grief and indignation showing the variety and range of expression of which she was capable. Hamilton painted a picture of her in this part, dressed in deep black, holding her boy by the hand, and appealing for help to her father-in-law, that even now brings the tears to one's eyes as one looks at it. Her son Henry, then eight years old, acted with her. It is said that, observing his mother at rehearsal in the agonies of the dying scene, he took the fiction for reality, and burst into a flood of tears. She herself for the fortnight before her appearance suffered from nervous agitation more than can be imagined. The whole account of her mental state is best told in her own words.

"No wonder I was nervous before the *memorable* day on which hung my own fate and that of my little family. I had quitted Bath, where all my efforts had been successful, and I feared lest a second failure in London might influence the public mind greatly to my prejudice, in the event of my return from Drury Lane, disgraced as I formerly had been. In due time I was summoned to the rehearsal of Isabella. Who can imagine my terror? I feared to utter a sound above an audible whisper; but by degrees enthusiasm cheered me into a forgetfulness of my fears, and I unconsciously threw out my voice, which failed not to be heard in the remotest part of the house by a friend who kindly undertook to ascertain the happy circumstance.

"The countenances, no less than tears and flattering encouragements of my companions, emboldened me more and more, and the second rehearsal was even more affecting than the first. Mr. King, who was then

manager, was loud in his applause. This second rehearsal took place on the 8th October 1782, and on the evening of that day I was seized with a nervous hoarseness, which made me extremely wretched; for I dreaded being obliged to defer my appearance on the 10th, longing, as I most earnestly did, at least to know the worst. I went to bed, therefore, in a state of dreadful suspense. Awaking the next morning, however, though out of restless, unrefreshing sleep, I found, upon speaking to my husband, that my voice was very much clearer. This, of course, was a great comfort to me; and, moreover, the sun, which had been completely obscured for many days, shone brightly through my curtains. I hailed it, though tearfully, yet thankfully, as a happy omen; and even now I am not ashamed of *this* (as it may, perhaps, be called) childish superstition. On the morning of the 10th my voice was, most happily, perfectly restored; and again '*the blessed sun shone brightly on me.*' On this eventful day my father arrived to comfort me, and to be a witness of my trial. He accompanied me to my dressing-room at the theatre. There he left me; and I, in one of what I call my desperate tranquillities, which usually impress me under terrific circumstances, there completed my dress, to the astonishment of my attendants, without uttering one word, though often sighing most profoundly."

The young actress had been puffed industriously before by Sheridan in the play-bills, and he had, no doubt, circulated in his dexterous way that the cause of her previous failure had been Garrick's jealousy, as, indeed, we know he told the actress herself.

There was a certain amount of expectancy and discussion. The house was full of all that was most

brilliant, intellectual, and "tonish" in the London of that day. They had all come with powdered heads, gold-laced coats, and diamond-encircled throats to see a pretty woman act an affecting play; but they were hardly prepared for the passion and pathos that for the time being shook them out of their artificial lace handkerchief grief and bowed the powdered heads with genuine emotion. She was well supported—Smith, Palmer, Farren, Packer, and Mrs. Love acting with her, to say nothing of the veteran Roger Kemble, her father, who was, she tells us, little less agitated than herself. Her husband did not even venture to appear behind or before the scenes, his agitation was so great.

"At length I was called to my fiery trial. The awful consciousness that one is the sole object of attention to that immense space, lined, as it were, with human intellect from top to bottom and all around, may, perhaps, be imagined, but can never be described, and can never be forgotten."

If that night were never to pass from the memory of Mrs. Siddons, neither would it ever pass from the memory of those who were present, or never be erased from the annals of the English stage, of which that beautiful and pathetic face and form was to be for many years the chief pride.

The story of *Isabella, or the Fatal Marriage,* is simple in construction, the interest centring in one figure, that of the heroine. Biron, son of a proud and worldly-minded man, marries a girl beneath him in station, contrary to his father's wish. A son is born, but Biron has hardly had time to rejoice over his birth before he is called away to the war, and, after some months, is reported as killed in battle. The wife

appears with the child in the first scene, appealing in vain, for pity's sake, to her father-in-law to give her something to support her and the infant. As the bailiff enters to arrest her for debt, Villeroy (whose attentions she had repelled, grieving as she was for her husband) comes forward, frees her from the importunities of her creditors, and induces her, for her child's sake, to marry him. Hardly is she Villeroy's wife before Biron returns. In despair, she kills herself.

There were moments, sentences that became traditional after this first night, as when, in reply to the question put to her on the arrival of the creditors as to what she would do, she answered, "Do! Nothing!" the very tone of the words told all her story. Miss Gordon fainted away on hearing the cry "Biron! Biron!" while we know Madame de Staël's account in *Corinne* of the hysterical laugh when Isabella kills herself at the end.

It was an extraordinary evening. The house was carried away in a storm of emotion; men were not ashamed to sob, and many women went into violent hysterics. It is difficult, indeed, for us now to understand such agitation; we fritter away our sentiment on the ordinary business of life:—

> The town in those days mostly lay
> Betwixt the tavern and the play.

The penny press had not yet come within the radius of everyone, and men depended on the theatre for their fictitious excitement. A new play, a young actor or actress, were greater subjects of interest than even Mr. Pitt's or Mr. Fox's last speech, which they only heard of piecemeal.

Mrs. Siddons had the good fortune still to play to audiences who were in the full enjoyment of their natural and critical powers of appreciation. She bent all her powers to calling forth their emotions. She touched them to the quick with her pathos and power. The audience surrendered at discretion to the summons of the young enchantress. Her own simple account of it all is very attractive; and afterwards, in the history of her life, when a little hardness, or a rather too abrupt assertion of superiority, is to be regretted, we turn to this spontaneous, almost girlish account of her first triumph—through which we can see the smiles beaming, the tears glistening—with pleasure and relief.

"I reached my own quiet fireside," she says, "on retiring from the scene of reiterated shouts and plaudits. I was half dead; and my joy and thankfulness were of too solemn and overpowering a nature to admit of words, or even tears. My father, my husband, and myself sat down to a frugal neat supper in a silence uninterrupted except by exclamations of gladness from Mr. Siddons. My father enjoyed his refreshments, but occasionally stopped short, and, laying down his knife and fork, lifting up his venerable face, and throwing back his silver hair, gave way to tears of happiness. We soon parted for the night; and I, worn out with continually broken rest and laborious exertion, after an hour's retrospection (who can conceive the intenseness of that reverie?), fell into a sweet and profound sleep, which lasted to the middle of the next day. I arose alert in mind and body."

And so the seven long years spent in tempering her genius, in working to gain strength and confidence, had borne their result, for we will not allow, as

Mr. Fitzgerald says, that her present success was owing to the absence "of the restraint from the patronizing instruction of Garrick," or any other exterior circumstance. The change had come from within, not from without. Hers was essentially a genius of tardy growth, both physically and mentally she did not reach her full development until the time when most actresses have enjoyed seven or eight years' success. She had worked, and, like all other workers, had reaped her reward; though, unlike the common run of workers, having genius to back her, the reward she reaped was not only a temporary success, but fame. The memory of this night has been handed down to us in company with Garrick's first appearance in *Richard III.* and Edmund Kean's in Shylock in 1814.

The critics next day were unanimous in her praise. Some found the voice a little harsh, the passion a little too "restless and fluttering," but all were agreed that a great event had occurred in the dramatic world. It is of little use repeating the praise and criticism, all *that* can be done in a reviewal of her artistic life; we are more interested in the personal history of the woman who had thus stirred up the waters that had threatened to become stagnant since the retirement of Garrick. It is natural for us rather to like to hear personal anecdotes of those who appear publicly before us than pages of hackneyed verbiage on their acting and appearance.

She wrote to Dr. Whalley one of those genuine, spontaneous letters that show how she was misunderstood by those who thought her hard and reserved:—"My dear, dear friend, the trying moment is passed, and I am crowned with a success which far exceeds even my hopes. God be praised! I am extremely hurried,

being obliged to dine at Linley's; have been at the rehearsal of a new tragedy in prose, a most affecting play, in which I have a part I like very much. I believe my next character will be Zara in the *Mourning Bride*. My friend Pratt was, I believe in my soul, as much agitated, and is as much rejoiced as myself. As I know it will give you pleasure, I venture to assure you I never in my life heard such peals of applause. I thought they would not have suffered Mr. Packer to end the play. Oh! how I wished for you last night, to share a joy which was too much for me to bear alone! My poor husband was so agitated that he durst not venture near the house. I enclose an epilogue which my good friend wrote for me, but which I could not, from excessive fatigue of mind and body, speak. Never, never let me forget his goodness to me. I have suffered tortures for (of?) the unblest these three days and nights past, and believe I am not in perfect possession of myself at present; therefore excuse, my dear Mr. Whalley, the incorrectness of this scrawl, and accept it as the first tribute of love (after the first decisive moment) from your ever grateful and truly affectionate, S. SIDDONS."

On the next night her success was even greater. The lobbies were lined with crowds of ladies and gentlemen "of the highest fashion." Lady Shelburne, Lord North the politician, Lady Essex, Mr. Sheridan and the Linley family weeping in his box, and hosts of others.

She very soon began to reap substantial benefits from her success.

"I should be afraid to say," she continues, "how many times *Isabella* was repeated successively, with still increasing favour. I was now highly gratified

by a removal from my very indifferent and inconvenient dressing-room to one on the stage-floor, instead of climbing a long staircase; and this room (oh, unexpected happiness!) had been Garrick's dressing-room. It is impossible to conceive my gratification when I saw my own figure in the self-same glass which had so often reflected the face and form of that unequalled genius—not, perhaps, without some vague, fanciful hope of a little degree of inspiration from it."

For eight nights the play was acted, and still every time she appeared the tide of popular favour ran higher. The box office was besieged by people wanting tickets, and the most ridiculous stories were told of the crush. Two old men stationed themselves to play chess outside at all hours, so as to secure tickets. Footmen lay stretched out asleep from dawn to buy places for their mistresses. Years afterwards, when at a great meeting at Edinburgh, Mrs. Siddons' health was proposed, Sir Walter Scott described the scene on one of those far-famed nights: the breakfasting near the theatre, waiting the whole day, the crushing at the doors at six o'clock, the getting in and counting their fingers till seven. But the very first step, the first word she uttered, was sufficient to overpay everyone their weariness. The house was then electrified, and it was only from witnessing the effects of her genius that one could guess to what a pitch theatrical excellence may be carried. "Those young fellows," added Sir Walter, "who have only seen the setting sun of this distinguished performer, beautiful and serene as it is, must give us old fellows, who have seen its rise, leave to hold our heads a little higher."

After *Isabella*, the actress appeared in Murphy's

Grecian Daughter, a very indifferent play, but one into which she breathed life and beauty by the power of her intuition.

Not yet had the ninety-one of the past century dawned upon civilisation with its Goddess of Reason, its scanty classic draperies, and its sandalled, barefooted beauties. Toupees, toques, bouffantes, hoops, sacques, and all the paraphernalia of horse-hair, powder, pomatum, and pins were still in the ascendant. Not yet had Charlotte Corday sacrificed her life for the liberty of her people; but the muttering of the coming storm was heard in the distance, and, with the prescience of genius, the young actress anticipated its advent, and amazed her audience by the simple beauty of her classic draperies, and shook them with excitement by her rapturous appeals to Liberty.

There was a glorious enthusiasm about her delivery of certain portions. She came to perish or to conquer. She seemed to grow several inches taller. Her voice gained tones undreamt of before :—

> Shall he not tremble when a daughter comes,
> Wild with her griefs, and terrible with wrongs?
> The *Man of blood shall hear me!* Yes, my voice
> Shall mount aloft upon the whirlwind's wing.

Her scorn was magnificent. Her reply to Dionysius, when he asks her to induce her husband to withdraw his army—

> Thinkest thou then
> So meanly of my Phocion? Dost thou deem him
> Poorly wound up to a mere fit of valour,
> To melt away in a weak woman's tears?
> Oh, thou dost little know him.

At the last line, Boaden tells us, there was a triumphant hurry and enjoyment in her scorn, which the

audience caught as electrical and applauded in rapture, for at least a minute :—

> A daughter's arm, fell monster, strikes the blow !
> Yes, *first* she strikes—an injured daughter's arm
> Sends thee devoted to the infernal gods !

After this she acted Jane Shore. "Mrs Siddons," as one of the critics remarked on this performance, "has the air of never being an actress; she seems unconscious that there is a motley crowd called the pit waiting to applaud her, or that a dozen fiddlers are waiting for her exit." Her "Forgive me, but forgive me," when asking pardon of her husband, convulsed the house with sobs. Crabb Robinson, while witnessing this harrowing performance, burst into a peal of laughter, and, upon being removed, was found to be in strong hysterics.

After Jane Shore, she appeared as Calista, Belvidera, and Zara. All were received with the same enthusiasm.

On the 5th June she acted Isabella for the last time that season, having performed in all about eighty nights, and on six of them for the benefit of others; and during that short time she may be said to have completely revolutionised the English stage. Nothing now was applauded but tragedy. The farces which before had won a laugh, were now not listened to. The young actress so completely depressed the spirits of the audience, that the best comic actor seemed unable to raise them. Already she was preparing the way for the stately solemnity of John Kemble and the Revival of Shakespearean Tragedy.

The town went "born mad," as Horace Walpole said, after her. The papers wrote about her continually, her dress, her movements. Nothing else

seemed to have the same interest. Her salary, originally five pounds a week, was raised to twenty pounds before the end of the season, and her first benefit realised eight hundred pounds.

On this latter occasion she addressed a letter to the public:—

"Mrs. Siddons would not have remained so long without expressing the high sense she had of the great honours done her at her late benefit, but that, after repeated trials, she could not find words adequate to her feelings, and she must at present be content with the plain language of a grateful mind; that her heart thanks all her benefactors for the distinguished and, she fears, too partial encouragement which they bestowed on this occasion. She is told that the splendid appearance on that night, and the emoluments arising from it, exceed anything ever recorded on a similar account in the annals of the English stage; but she has not the vanity to imagine that this arose from any superiority over many of her predecessors or some of her contemporaries. She attributes it wholly to that liberality of sentiment which distinguishes the inhabitants of this great metropolis from those of any other in the world. They know her story—they know that for many years, by a strange fatality, she was confined to move in a narrow sphere, in which the rewards attendant on her labours were proportionally small. With a generosity unexampled, they proposed at once to balance the account, and pay off the arrears due, according to the rate, the too partial rate, at which they valued her talents. She knows the danger arising from extraordinary and unmerited favours, and will carefully guard against any approach of pride, too often their attendant. Happy shall she

esteem herself, if by the utmost assiduity, and constant exertion of her poor abilities, she shall be able to lessen, though hopeless ever to discharge, the vast debt she owes the public."

Mrs. Siddons was always too fond of taking the public into her confidence. Everything in this letter can be taken for granted; and it would have been more dignified to have kept silence.

More pleasing and natural are the letters written to her friends. She wrote thus to Dr. Whalley about this time:—

"Just at this moment are you, my dear Sir, sitting down to supper, and 'every guest's a friend.' Oh! that I were with you, but for one half-hour. 'Oh! God forbid!' says my dear Mrs. Whalley; 'for he would talk so loud and so fast, that he would throw himself into a fever, and die of unsatisfied curiosity into the bargain.' Do I flatter myself, my dear Sir? Oh no! you have both done me the honour to assure me that you love me, and I would not forego the blessed idea for the world . . . I did receive all your letters, and thank you for them a thousand times. One line of them is worth all the acclamations of ten thousand shouting theatres."

And so closes this wonderful year in the great actress's life—the one to which she always looked back as the climax of her happiness and good fortune.

CHAPTER VI.

DUBLIN AND EDINBURGH.

IRISHMEN have a natural theatrical instinct, and Dublin, at the time of which we write, was to a certain degree valued as a censor in dramatic affairs as highly as London. A Dublin audience often ventured to dissent from the judgments of the metropolis, and, as in the case of Mrs. Pritchard, who, Campbell quaintly tells us, "electrified the Irish with disappointment," to entirely reverse them. Most of the best Drury Lane players had begun their career at the Smock Alley theatre, and many of them had Irish blood in their veins. The theatre was the finest in the kingdom next to Drury Lane, boasting the innovation of a drop scene, representing the Houses of Parliament, instead of the conventional green curtain.

The same causes which placed the provincial towns of England in an important position, so far as social and dramatic affairs were concerned, operated still more effectually in the case of Dublin. To cross to London in those days was as long and tedious a journey as to go to New York in ours; and none even of the nobility thought of doing so every year. The

vice-regal court was, therefore, really a court, surrounded by a certain amount of brilliancy and splendour. Ever since the days of Peg Woffington and the Miss Gunnings, Irish beauties had dared to set the fashion; and we read in a letter written from Dublin, by a leader of fashion of the day, that it is of no use English women coming over unless they are prepared to "make their waists of the circumference of two oranges, no more"; their "heads a foot high, exclusive of feathers, and stretching to a pent-house of most horrible projection behind, the breadth from wing to wing considerably broader than your shoulders; and as many different things in your cap as in Noah's ark. . . . Verily," the lady ends, "I never did see such monsters as the heads now in vogue; I am a monster, too, but a moderate one."

Round the small court fluttered young equerries who wrote plays, and were devoted to the drama. Actors and actresses themselves, if at all within the pale of respectability, were admitted to the vice-regal circle. Mrs. Inchbald was intimate with many of the fashionable and literary ladies. Daly, the manager of the theatre, was a regular *habitué* of the "Castle"; and John Kemble, who had arrived in Ireland some time before his sister, had been introduced by the equerry Jephson to the "set," including Tighe, Courtenay, and others.

All this society was thrown into a ferment of excitement when it was announced that the beautiful young actress, who had turned all heads in London, was coming to Dublin. Kemble was interviewed and pestered with inquiries on the subject. Indeed, his prestige for the time was vastly increased by his relationship. At a dinner at the Castle, Lord Inchiquin gave as a toast,

"The matchless Mrs. Siddons," and sent her brother a ring containing her miniature set in diamonds.

Daly had gone over himself to engage her; and it was said she had refused all provincial offers in England for the sake of winning the hearts of the Irish critics. All seemed propitious, and the way prepared for the coming of the conquering heroine. Events, however, did not turn out as expected. There, where the vivacious, impudent, good-natured Peg Woffington, with her "bad" voice and swaggering way, became a popular idol, the queenly Siddons, with her imperious, tragic manner, extorted praise for her acting, no doubt, but never won their hearts. In spite of the Irish blood in her veins, she had no fellow-feeling for the people; and an antagonism sprang up between her and her Dublin audience from the first. She disliked the dirt, ostentation, insincerity, and frivolity of Irishmen, and refused to acknowledge their kind-heartedness and genuine artistic appreciation.

By her letters we can see the impression the country made on her. She started in the beginning of July, accompanied by a small party, which consisted of Brereton, her husband, and her sister. On the 14th she writes to her friend Whalley:—

"I thank you a thousand and a thousand times for your letter; but you don't mention having heard from me since you left England. We rejoice most sincerely that you are arrived without any material accident, without any dangerous ones I mean, for, to be sure, some of them were very *materially* entertaining. Oh! how I laugh whenever the drowsy adventure comes across my imagination, for 'more was meant than met the ear.' I am sure I would have given the world to have seen my dear Mrs. Whalley upon

the little old tub. How happy you are in your descriptions! So she was very well; then very jocular she must be. I think her conversation, thus enthroned and thus surrounded, must have been the highest treat in all the world. Some parts of your tour must have been enchanting, How good it was of you to wish me a partaker of your pastoral dinner! Be assured, my dear, dear friends, no one can thank you more sincerely, or be more sensible of the honour of your regard, though many may deserve it better. What a comfortable thing to meet with such agreeable people! But society and converse like yours and dear Mrs. Whalley's must very soon make savages agreeable. How did poor little Paphy bear it? Did she remonstrate in her usual melting tones? I am sure she was very glad to be at rest, which does not happen in a carriage, I remember, for any length of time. I can conceive nothing so provoking or ridiculous as the Frenchman's politeness, and poor Vincent's perplexity. You will have heard, long ere this reaches you, that our sweet D—— is safely delivered of a very fine girl, which, I know, will give you no small pleasure. Now for myself. Our journey was delightful; the roads through Wales present you with mountains unsurmountable, the grandest and most beautiful prospects to be conceived; but I want your pen to describe them.

"We got very safe to Holyhead, and then I felt as if some great event was going to take place, having never been on the sea. I was awed, but not terrified; feeling myself in the hands of a great and powerful God 'whose mercy is over all His works.' The sea was particularly rough; we were lifted mountains high, and sank again as low in an instant. Good God! how

tremendous, how wonderful! A pleasing terror took hold on me, which it is impossible to describe, and I never felt the majesty of the Divine Creator so fully before. I was dreadfully sick, and so were my poor sister and Mr. Brereton. Mr. Siddons was pretty well; and here, my dear friend, let me give you a little wholesome advice: allways (you see I have forgot to spell) go to bed the instant you go on board, for by lying horizontally, and keeping very quiet, you cheat the sea of half its influence. We arrived in Dublin the 16th June, half-past twelve at night. There is not a tavern or a house of any kind in this capital city of a rising kingdom, as they call themselves, that will take a woman in; and, do you know, I was obliged, after being shut up in the Custom-house officer's room, to have the things examined, which room was more like a dungeon than anything else—after staying here above an hour and a half, I tell you, I was obliged, sick and weary as I was, to wander about the streets on foot (for the coaches and chairs were all gone off the stands) till almost two o'clock in the morning, raining, too, as if heaven and earth were coming together. A pretty beginning! thought I; but these people are a thousand years behind us in every respect. At length Mr. Brereton, whose father had provided a bed for him on his arrival, ventured to say he would insist on having a bed for us at the house where he was to sleep. Well, we got to this place, and the lady of the house vouchsafed, after many times telling us that she never took in ladies, to say we should sleep there that night."

The actress's first appearance was made in *Isabella*, on the 21st June 1783. The theatre was crowded to suffocation, and guineas and half-guineas were paid

for seats in the pit and gallery; but after the first night the enthusiasm seemed to die away, and Mrs. Crawford, at Crow Street Theatre, who had been completely dethroned by Mrs. Siddons in London, now boldly ventured to come forward in opposition to her rival, and, to her own astonishment, as well as that of everyone else, soon commanded larger houses. The critics also soon began their attacks, taking the form of ridicule, a method of warfare very trying to a person of her proud, sensitive nature.

"On Saturday, Mrs. Siddons, about whom all the world has been talking, exposed her beautiful, adamantine, soft, and comely person, for the first time, in the Theatre Royal, Smock Alley. The house was crowded with hundreds more than it could hold, with thousands of admiring spectators that went away without a sight. She was nature itself; she was the most exquisite work of art. Several fainted, even before the curtain drew up. The fiddlers in the orchestra blubbered like hungry children crying for their bread and butter; and when the bell rang for music between the acts, the tears ran from the bassoon player's eyes in such showers that they choked the finger-stops, and, making a spout of the instrument, poured in such a torrent upon the first fiddler's book, that, not seeing the overture was in two sharps, the leader of the band actually played in two flats; but the sobs and sighs of the groaning audience, and the noise of the corks drawn from the smelling-bottles, prevented the mistake being discovered. The briny pond in the pit was three feet deep, and the people that were obliged to stand upon the benches, were in that position up to their ankles in tears. An Act of Parliament against her playing will certainly pass, for she has infected the volunteers, and

they sit reading *The Fatal Marriage,* crying and roaring all the time. May the curses of an insulted nation pursue the gentlemen of the College, the gentlemen of the Bar, and the peers and peeresses that hissed her on the second night. True it is that Mr. Garrick never could make anything of her, and pronounced her below mediocrity; true it is the London audience did not like her; but what of that?"

Her consciousness of the antagonism that existed against her in the press and amongst the public made her stay in the capital by no means either pleasant or successful, and she was glad to start with the party which Daly had got together to go the round of the country. It consisted of the manager and his future wife, Miss Barsanti, the two Kembles, Miss Younge, Digges, Miss Philipps, and Mrs. Melnotte, wife of Pratt Melnotte, of Bath celebrity.

An amusing account of the tour has been left by Bernard the actor, who happened to be in Ireland at the time. The solemn Kembles certainly seem out of place in the rollicking fun, and we can imagine Mrs. Siddons's stately disgust when a gentleman from the pit called out, "Sally, me jewel, how are you?" or, as occurred several times, when a general dance took place in the gallery as soon as the orchestra began.

Mrs. Siddons does not seem to have had any occasion for changing later the first opinion she formed of the country, for we find her writing confidentially to Mr. Whalley from Cork, on the 29th of August, that she thinks the city of Dublin a sink of filthiness. "The noisome smells, and the multitudes of shocking and most miserable objects, made me resolve never to stir out but to my business. I like not the people either; they are all ostentation and insincerity, and in their

ideas of finery very like the French, but not so cleanly; and they not only speak, but think coarsely. This is in confidence; therefore, your fingers on your lips, I pray. They are tenacious of their country to a degree of folly that is very laughable, and would call me the blackest of ingrates were they to know my sentiments of them. I have got a thousand pounds among them this summer. I always acknowledge myself obliged to them, but I cannot love them. I know but one among them that can in any degree atone for the barbarism of the rest, who thinks there are other means of expressing esteem besides forcing people to eat and to drink, the doing which to a most offensive degree they call Irish hospitality. I long to be at home, sitting quietly in the little snug parlour, where I had last the pleasure, or rather the pain, of seeing you that night. For the first time in my life I wished not to see you. I dreaded it, and with reason. I knew (which was the case) I should not recover that cruel farewell for several days.

"Oh! my dear friend, do the pleasures of life compensate for the pangs? I think not. Some people place the whole happiness of life in the pleasures of imagination, in building castles; for my part, I am not one that builds very magnificent ones. Nay; I don't build any castles, but cottages without end. May the great Disposer of all events but permit me to spend the evening of my toilsome, bustling day in a cottage, where I may sometimes have the converse and society which will make me more worthy those imperishable habitations which are prepared for the spirits of just men made perfect! Yes, let me take up my rest in this world near my beloved Langford. You know this has been my castle any time these four years. And I am

making a little snug party. Mr. Nott and my dear sister I have secured, and make no doubt of gaining a few others. Is not this a delightful scheme?

"I have played for one charity since I have been here (I am at Cork, I should tell you), and am to play for another to-morrow—your favourite Zara, in the *Mourning Bride*. I am extremely happy that you like your little companion so well [alluding to a miniature of herself she had sent him]. I have sat to a young man in this place, who has made a small full-length of me in Isabella, upon the first entrance of Biron. You will think this an arduous undertaking, but he has succeeded to admiration. I think it more like me than any I have ever yet seen. I am sure you would have been delighted with it. I never was so well in my life as I have been in Ireland; but, God be praised, I shall set out for dear England next Tuesday.

"This letter has been begun this month, and finished by a line or two at a time, so you'll find it a fine scrawl, and I am still so mere a matter-of-fact body as to despair of giving you the least entertainment. I can boast no other claim to the honour and happiness of your correspondence than a very sincere affection for you both, joined with the most perfect esteem for your most amiable qualities and great talent. Say all that 's kind for me to my dear Mrs. W——, and believe me, ever your most affectionate

"S. SIDDONS."

"Cork, August 29th.

"I hope you will give me the pleasure of hearing from you soon."

"London, October 7th, 1783.

"For God's sake, my dear friends, pray for my

memory. I had forgot to pay the postage, as you kindly desired, and this poor letter has been wandering about the world ever since I left Cork.

"It was opened in Ireland, you see, so I must never show my face there again. The King commands *Isabella* to-morrow, and I play *Jane Shore* on Saturday. I have affronted Mrs. Jackson by not being able to procure her places. I am extremely sorry for it, as I had the highest esteem for herself, and her friendship to you had tied her close to my heart. I have done all I could to reinstate myself in her favour, but in vain. Poor Mr. Nott has been in great trouble; he has lost a brother lately that was more nearly allied than by blood, and for whose loss he is inconsolable. He is not in town, but I hope soon to see him. Adieu! Mr. Siddons, &c., desire kindest wishes. The last letter I wrote to you I was very near serving in the same manner. Is it not a little alarming? I fear I shall be superannuated in a few years."

Her acrimony is almost incomprehensible. After the expressions used in the above letter we can quite understand how she made herself unpopular. She might have wished secrecy kept, but she was not the woman to hide what she felt. She is unjust also in the statemant that Irishmen "not only think but speak coarsely." On this, as on other occasions, she allowed her wounded vanity to dim her power of observation. The punishment, however, came sharp and sudden, and destroyed her happiness for many a day.

While Mrs. Siddons was acting in Dublin, Jackson, the manager of the Edinburgh Theatre, opened communications with her with a view to an engagement. Finding it difficult to come to terms, he at last travelled over himself, but the history of the negotiation from

beginning to end makes us understand Mrs. Siddons's unpopularity with all her managers. There is too resolute an adherence to her own interests, too much of a calm, cold superiority. She "haggled" and bargained over every step, until Jackson almost gave the whole business up in despair. Encouraged, however, FitzGerald tells us, by a purse of £200, which some noblemen and gentlemen of Scotland had liberally made up to assist him in making the engagement, he at last assented to her terms. The Siddons' demands for nine nights' performance, besides a "clear benefit," was £400. They soon, however, heard of the £200 subscription, and Mr. Siddons then wrote to know if that sum was to be included in the £400, or if it were to come under the head of an extra emolument. The manager was explicit in his statement that the £200 was intended for his benefit. On this Mrs. Siddons announced that she did not wish for any given sum, but would take half the clear receipts. Poor Jackson was obliged to agree to this breach of contract, as he had already gone so far with his patrons in Edinburgh. The history of the negotiation, however, is not pleasant reading for Mrs. Siddons's admirers, especially when we find later that she contrived to have the £200 subscription paid over to her without the knowledge of the manager, and that at the end of her engagement Jackson found himself a loser. The "charges of the house" were put too low. Actors like Pope, King, and Miss Farren had always allowed something handsome on settlement. Nothing was to be obtained from Mrs. Siddons.

The average profit would have been about £25 a night. From Dublin she returned to London, and acted her second season there; it was even more bril-

liant than her first, and rendered noteworthy both by her first appearance with her brother, John Kemble, in *The Gamester*, who from that time frequently acted with her, and by her acting of Isabella in *Measure for Measure*, in which part she made her first success in a Shakespearean character in London. She looked the novice of St. Clare to perfection. In the spring she made her way northwards to keep her engagement with the Edinburgh manager, and on Saturday, 22nd May, 1784, she appeared on the stage of the Royalty Theatre, in Belvidera. The well-known impassibility of the Edinburgh audience affected Mrs. Siddons with an intolerable sense of depression.

After some of her grandest outbursts of passion, to which no expression of applause had responded, exhausted and breathless, she would pant out in despair, under her breath, "Stupid people, stupid people!" This habitual reserve she soon found, however, gave way at times to very violent exhibitions of enthusiasm, the more fervent from its general expression—once, indeed, the whole of the sleep-walking scene in *Macbeth* was so vehemently applauded that, contrary to all rule, she had to go over it a second time before the piece was allowed to proceed.

Afterwards, when by these ebullitions of real feeling she had proved her audience's appreciation, she could afford to tell stories of their stolidity when she first appeared amongst them. The second night, disheartened at the cold reception of her most thrilling passages, after one desperate effort she paused for a reply. It came at last, when the silence was broken by a single voice exclaiming, "That's no bad!" a tribute which was the signal for unbounded applause. One venerable old gentleman, who was taken by his

daughter to see the great actress in *Venice Preserved*, sat with perfect composure through the first act and into the second, when he asked his daughter, "Which was the woman Siddons?" As Belvidera is the only female part in the play, she had no difficulty in answering. Nothing more occurred till the catastrophe; he then inquired, "Is this a comedy or a tragedy?" "Why, bless you, father, a tragedy." "So I thought, for I am beginning to feel a commotion." This instance was typical of the whole of the audience—and once they began to "feel a commotion," there was no longer any doubt about their expression of it. The passion, indeed, for hysterics and fainting at her performances ran into a fashionable mania. A distinguished surgeon, familiarly called "Sandy Wood," who, with his shrewd common-sense, had a way of seeing through the follies of his fashionable patients, was called from his seat in the pit, where he was to be found every evening Mrs. Siddons acted, to attend upon the hysterics of one of the excitable ladies who were tumbling around him. On his way through the crowd a friend said to him, alluding to Mrs. Siddons, "This is glorious acting, Sandy." Looking round at the fainting and screaming ladies in the boxes, Wood answered, "Yes, and a d——d deal o't, too." Some verses in the *Scot's Magazine* give a picture of the scene, the pit being described as "all porter and pathos, all whisky and whining," while—

> "From all sides of the house, hark! the cry how it swells,
> While the boxes are torn with most heart-piercing yells!"

The enthusiasm to see her was so great, that one day there were more than 2,500 applications for about 600 seats. The oppression and heat was so great in the

crowded and ill-ventilated theatre, that an epidemic that attacked the town was humorously attributed to this cause, and was called "the Siddons fever." All that was most cultured and intellectual in Edinburgh came to do her homage—Blair, Hume, Beattie, Mackenzie, Home, all attended her performances. She made by her engagement, the share of the house, benefit, and subscription, more than one thousand pounds. And this success was not only among the educated classes, the pit and gallery paid their tribute besides. Campbell tells us how a poor servant-girl with a basket of greens on her arm, one day stopped near her in the High Street, and hearing her speak, said, "Ah, weel do I ken that sweet voice, that made me greet sae sair the streen."

Before she left she was presented with a silver tea-urn, as a mark of "esteem" for superior genius and unrivalled talents. She refers to this visit later in her grandiloquent style. "How shall I express my gratitude for the honours and kindness of my northern friends? for, should I attempt it, I should be thought the very queen of egotists. But never can I forget the private no less than public marks of their gratifying suffrages."

CHAPTER VII.

CLOUDS.

On the 15th June she tore herself away from all these "private" and "public marks of gratifying suffrages,' and again paid a visit to Dublin, which at the beginning was more successful than her former one, but towards the end was clouded with untoward circumstances, which militated against her for the whole of her professional career.

This time she became the guest of her former friend Miss Boyle, now become Mrs. O'Neil of Shane's Castle. The Lord-Lieutenant welcomed her as if she were some "great lady of rank," and she tells us how she was received "by all the *first families* with the most flattering hospitality, and the days I passed with them will be ever remembered among the most pleasurable of my life." She paid a visit to Shane's Castle. "I have not words to describe the beauty and splendour of this enchanting place, which, I am sorry to say, has since been levelled to the earth by a tremendous fire. Here were often assembled all the talent, and rank, and beauty of Ireland. Among the persons of the Leinster family whom I met here was poor Lord Edward

Fitzgerald, the most amiable, honourable, though misguided youth I ever knew.

"The luxury of this establishment almost inspired the recollections of an Arabian Night's entertainment. Six or eight carriages, with a numerous throng of lords and ladies on horseback, began the day by making excursions around this terrestrial paradise, returning home just in time to dress for dinner. The table was served with a profusion and elegance to which I have never seen anything comparable. The sideboards were decorated with adequate magnificence, on which appeared several immense silver flagons containing claret. A fine band of musicians played during the whole of the repast. They were stationed in the corridors, which led into a fine conservatory, where we plucked our dessert from numerous trees of the most exquisite fruits. The foot of the conservatory was washed by the waves of a superb lake, from which the cool and pleasant wind came, to murmur in concert with the harmony from the corridor. The graces of the presiding genius, the lovely mistress of the mansion, seemed to blend with the whole scene."

These Arabian Nights' entertainments, delightful as they may have been, were calculated to make her very unpopular with her profession. Stories about her fine-lady airs were freely circulated, to which her own want of tact, and the injudicious behaviour of her husband, gave a certain foundation.

One of these that was actually believed, and copied into the London papers, was to the effect that, having been persuaded to visit the studio of a certain Mr. Home, a local artist, he asked her to sit to him. "Impossible," was the reply, "I can hardly find time to sit to Sir Joshua Reynolds." The offended artist

insinuated that her refusal would not ruin him; upon which she was said to have boxed his ears and stormed out of the house. This is so palpably ill-natured, and from a knowledge of Mrs. Siddons's character so improbable, that we only give it, among a mass of other evidence, to show how the feeling against her gradually arose, which, to a certain extent, was destined to pursue her through life. Mr. Siddons's good sense did not materially aid her. On one occasion, dining, in company with John Kemble, at the house of a Dublin merchant, their host expressed a great wish to be introduced to the young actress. "I should like to very much, but do not know how to break the matter to her," was the husband's reply, which, we must confess, was not calculated to increase the geniality of feeling entertained for her in general society. She managed also to offend the manager, Mr. Daly, who by all accounts was not an agreeable person, for we read in Bernard's *Reminiscences* that he was an extremely vain, jealous-tempered man, proud of his acting and good looks. Mrs. Siddons insinuates that his dislike arose to her scornful rejection of attentions he endeavoured to press upon her. However that may be, the following is her own account of the manner in which he first showed his enmity, and gives a curious insight into the wretched bickerings and heart-burnings of the profession:—

"The manager of the theatre also very soon began to adopt every means of vexation for me that he could possibly devise, merely because I chose to suggest at rehearsal that his proper situation, as Falconbridge in *King John*, was at the right hand of the King. During the scene between Constance and Austria, he thought it necessary that he should,

though he did it most ungraciously, adopt this arrangement; but his malevolence pursued me unremittedly from that moment. He absurdly fancied that he was of less consequence when placed at so great a distance from the front of the stage, at the ends of which the kings were seated; but he had little or nothing to say, and his being in the front would have greatly interrupted and diminished the effect of Constance's best scene. He made me suffer, however, sufficiently for my personality by employing all the newspapers to abuse and annoy me the whole time I remained in Dublin, and to pursue me to England with malignant scandal; but of that anon. The theatre, meantime, was attended to his heart's content—indeed, the whole of this engagement was as profitable as my most sanguine hopes could have anticipated."

Presently, however, she was to be put on her trial for a more serious charge. The unfortunate actor, Digges, while rehearsing with her, was struck down with paralysis. Lee Lewes, who endeavours to defend her in all this business, tells us that her engagement was then drawing to a close, and she was announced to play at Cork a few days after. Asked to perform in a benefit for the poor man, she replied that she was sorry she had but one night to spare, and had already promised to play for the Marshalsea pensioners. Thinking better of this determination, however, later, she despatched "a messenger" to Digges, saying she had reconsidered the matter, and would be glad to perform for him. Digges expressed his gratitude, and the night and play were fixed; but, according to her own evidence, everything was done to annoy her and prevent the carrying out

of her charitable intentions. This is her account of the business:—

"When my visit to Shane Castle was over, I entered into another engagement in Dublin. Among the actors was Mr. Digges, who had formerly held a high rank in the drama, but who was now by age and infirmity reduced to a subordinate and mortifying situation. It occurred to me that I might be of some use to him if I could persuade the manager to give him a night, and the actors to perform for him, at the close of my engagement; but when I proposed my request to the manager (Daly declares, as we shall see, that the proposal came from him, and not from her), he told me it could not be, because the whole company would be obliged to leave the Dublin theatre in order to open the theatre at Limerick, but that he would lend the house for my purpose if I could procure a sufficient number of actors to perform a play. By indefatigable labour, and in spite of cruel annoyances Mr. Siddons and myself got together, from all the little country theatres, as many as would enable us to attempt *Venice Preserved*. Oh! to be sure it was a scene of disgust and confusion. I acted Belvidera, without having ever previously seen the face of one of the actors—for there was no time for even one rehearsal—but the motive procured us indulgence. Poor Mr. Digges was most materially benefited by this most ludicrous performance, and I put my disgust into my pocket since money passed into his. Thus ended my Irish engagement, but not so my persecution by the manager, at whose instance the newspapers were filled with the most unjust and malignant reflections on me. All the time I was on a visit of some length to the Dowager Duchess of Leinster, uncon-

scious of the gathering storm, whilst the public mind was imbibing poisonous prejudices against me. Alas for those who subsist by the stability of public favour!"

The above was written by Mrs. Siddons in later days, and is eminently unsatisfactory from every point of view. The dragging in of the Dowager Duchess of Leinster, when we want a plain statement of facts, is irritating, and the complaint against public favour at the end is stilted and artificial. No doubt the manager was unfriendly, but her first impulse was not a generous one, and she laid herself open to ill-natured constructions being put on her conduct. The real story we take to be this: Digges (to whom she was not particularly inclined to be friendly, owing to her attributing to him the authorship of the satirical criticisms on her acting when she first arrived in Ireland) was struck down by illness, in a manner and under circumstances to arouse the deep sympathy of the members of his profession, ever charitable to one another. Daly, the manager, before communicating with Digges, asked Mr. Siddons if his wife would give her services for a benefit. He, instigated of course by her, refused the request. On this refusal, not unjustly, were based all the charges brought against her. Daly then offered to pay for her services; this also was refused, and nothing further was done until Mrs. Siddons, finding the whole affair unfavourably canvassed, sent Mr. Siddons to inform Digges that she had arranged to play for his benefit. This graciousness came too late; the rumour of her refusal had already got abroad, and very unfavourable comments were made both by the press and the public. The annoyance also caused her by the inefficient representation of *Venice Preserved* might have been avoided if she had at once acceded to Daly's

request. As it was, the whole company had been obliged to leave for the opening of the Limerick Theatre. She and Mr. Siddons, therefore, were obliged to get together a scratch company, and give the benefit after the season was over, which could not have been nearly so advantageous to the object of the charity. Money was made, but not so much as if she had acted in the middle of the season. We can hardly believe she was actuated in all this by love of money; it is more likely that the proud resentment she felt when unfavourably criticised in any way had interfered with her kindlier impulse.

In the case of Brereton, the same unfortunate sensitiveness seems to have been at work. Brereton was the leading actor of her troupe, always played lover to her heroine, and, it was said, had at one time made his love in so earnest a fashion, that the beautiful actress had, as in the case of Daly, to check his ardour, or, as Boaden expresses it, "in kindling his imagination the divinity unsettled his reason, and in clasping the goddess he became sensible of the charms of the woman." However this may be, Brereton was by no means friendly, and never missed an opportunity of covertly attacking her. When asked, therefore, to play for his benefit, she actually deducted ten pounds from the profits as her own emolument. Percy Fitzgerald seems inclined to think that "all this wretched muddle was the work of Mr. Siddons, who, considering the charitable taxes laid on her, and the many benefits she had to assist, found himself obliged, like most husbands of money-getting actresses, to bargain and chaffer for her gifts as if they were wares, and get as much money as they could be made to bring in."

But we think that at no time of their married life had Siddons enough influence to induce her to do anything against her better judgment, and we doubt very much whether he was ever allowed to complete a bargain of any kind, although his name was frequently used. What aroused the sympathy of the public more warmly in the cause of Brereton was the madness that subsequently fell upon him.

The best side of her character was ever called out by adversity. It was perhaps undignified to defend herself as she did—or, rather, as Siddons did in her name—by an exculpatory letter to the papers, appealing to the two actors, Digges and Brereton, to declare whether she had, or had not, played for them when asked. Two letters were thus extorted from them declaring that she had done all that was necessary to satisfy the calls of charity, &c. Nothing could be conceived more fatal to her cause than all this bandying of evidence. The idol men set up to worship they generally delight to drag down and trample under foot if they dare. In this case, however, they might insult and humiliate, but they could not drag their victim from the high estate she had achieved.

Her very high qualities as a wife and mother, her decorum of conduct, so different to others of her profession, seemed to add a zest to the acrimony with which they assaulted her. The first part in which she appeared on the London boards after her return from Dublin was Mrs. Beverley in the *Gamester* to her brother's Stukeley. Hardly had the curtain been raised, before a storm of hooting and hissing broke forth, and she whom they had late proclaimed a queen, who had seen the town enslaved at her feet, now stood "the object of public scorn." She did the best thing she

could by remaining with perfect composure facing them, but in those few dreadful moments she discounted all the adulation and success she had enjoyed. How intense the suffering was we can see by the account written years after.

"I had left London," she tells us, "the object of universal approbation, but, on my return, only a few weeks afterwards, I was received, on my first night's appearance, with universal opprobrium, accused of hardness of heart, and total insensibility to everything and everybody except my own interest. Unhappily, contrary winds had for some days precluded the possibility of receiving from Dublin such letters as would have refuted those atrocious calumnies, and saved me from the horrors of this dreadful night, when I was received with hissing and hooting. Amidst this afflicting clamour I made several attempts to be heard, when at length a gentleman stood forth in the middle of the front of the pit, impelled by benevolent and gentlemanly feeling, who, as I advanced to make my last attempt at being heard, accosted me with these words: 'For Heaven's sake, Madam, do not degrade yourself by an apology, for there is nothing necessary to be said!' I shall always look back with gratitude to this gallant man's solitary advocacy of my cause; like Abdiel, 'faithful found; among the faithless, faithful only he.' His admonition was followed by reiterated clamour, when my dear brother appeared, and carried me away from this scene of insult.

"The instant I quitted it I fainted in his arms; and, on my recovery, I was thankful that my persecutors had not had the gratification of beholding this weakness. After I was tolerably restored to myself, I was

induced, by the persuasions of my husband, my brother, and Mr. Sheridan, to present myself again before that audience by whom I had been so savagely treated, and before whom, but in consideration of my children, I would have never appeared again. The play was *The Gamester*, which commences with a scene between Beverley and Charlotte.

"Great and pleasant was my astonishment to find myself, on the second rising of the curtain, received with a silence so profound that I was absolutely awe-struck, and never yet have I been able to account for this surprising contrast; for I really think that the falling of a pin might have been then heard upon the stage."

On her entrance the second time, Mrs. Siddons summoned enough courage to address the audience:—

"Ladies and gentlemen, the kind and flattering partiality which I have uniformly experienced in this place would make the present interruption distressing to me indeed, were I in the slightest degree conscious of having deserved your censure. I feel no such consciousness.

"The stories which have been circulated against me are calumnies. When they shall be proved to be true, my aspersors will be justified; but, till then, my respect for the public leads me to be confident that I shall be protected from unmerited insult."

These words, spoken by the Muse of Tragedy, with her stately dignity and flaming eyes, had an instantaneous effect. She withdrew; the curtain fell.

King, the actor, came forward to beg the indulgence of the audience for a few moments; and when she appeared again, pale but calm, not an attempt at interruption was heard. On several occasions after, an

attempt was made to renew the interruption; but the orderly portion of the audience was strong enough to quell it. She acknowledged the applause when she came on, and endeavoured to appear perfectly indifferent to the hissing; but all the triumphant confidence of the first days of success seemed to have deserted her for the time, and she was again the uncertain, tottering *débutante*. Her splendid genius was, however, but dimmed, and all her suffering but lent to serve as a stepping-stone to a higher level than she had yet attained. We must give here some letters she wrote to her friends, the Whalleys, as giving an insight into that brave heart of this wonderful woman, whose "victorious faith upheld her" in this and many subsequent trials. What wonder, however, that in later years she grew hard and proud—the first bloom of trust and belief was rubbed off in these her first encounters with the rough judgment of the mob. From henceforth the confiding girlish Ophelia and Juliet vanish from the scene, and Lady Macbeth, with her fierce reliance on intellectual power alone, and indignant scorn of all human judgment, appears. She wrote to the Whalleys:—

"My dearest Friends,

"I hardly dare hope that you will remember me. I know I don't deserve that you should; but I know, also, that you are too steadfast and too good to cast me off for a seeming negligence to which my heart and soul are averse, and the appearance of which I have incessantly regretted. What can I say in my defence? I have been very unhappy; now 'tis over I will venture to tell you so, that you may not 'lose the dues of rejoicing.' 'Envy, malice,

detraction, all the fiends of hell have compassed me round about to destroy me' ; ' but blessed be God who hath given me the victory,' &c. .I have been charged with almost everything bad, except incontinence, and it is attributed to me as thinking a woman may be guilty of every crime in the catalogue of crimes, provided she retain her chastity.

" God help them and forgive them, they know but little of me. I daresay you will wonder that a favourite should stand her ground so long ; and in truth so do I. I have been degraded ; I am now again the favourite servant of the public, and I have kept the noiseless tenor of my temper in these extremes. My spirit has been grieved, but my victorious faith upholds me. I look forward to a better world for happiness, and am placed in this in mercy to be a candidate for that. But what makes the wound rankle deeper is that ingratitude, hypocrisy, and perfidy have barbed the darts. But it is over, and I am happy. Good God ! what would I give to see you both, but for an hour ! How many thousand, thousand times do I wish myself with yon, and long to unburthen my heart to you. I can't bear the idea of your being so long absent. I know you will expect to hear what I have been doing ; and I wish I could do this to your satisfaction. Suffice it to say that I have acted Lady Macbeth, Desdemona, and several other things this season with the most unbounded approbation ; and you have no idea how the innocence and playful simplicity of the latter have laid hold on the hearts of the people. I am very much flattered by this, as nobody ever has done anything with that character before. My brother is charming in *Othello ;* indeed, I must do the public the justice to say that they have been extremely

indulgent, if not partial, to every character I have performed.

"I have never seen Mr. Pratt since I heard from you, but he discovers his unworthiness to my own family; he abuses me, it seems, to one of my sisters in the most complete manner. How distressing is it to be so deceived! Our old Mary, too, whom you must remember, has proved a very viper. She has lately taken to drinking, has defrauded us of a great deal of money given her to pay the tradespeople, and in her cups has abused Mr. Siddons and me beyond all bounds; and I believe in my soul that all the scandalous reports of Mr. Siddons's ill-treatment of me originated entirely in her. One may pay for one's experience, and the consciousness of acting rightly is a comfort that hell-born malice cannot rob us of. Lady Langham has done me the honour to call with her daughter. Her drawings are very wonderful things for such a girl. In the compositions she has drawn me in *Macbeth* asleep and awake; but I think she has been unsuccessful in this effort. Next week I shall see your daughter and the rest. Sarah is an elegant creature, and Maria is as beautiful as a seraph. Harry grows very awkward, sensible, and well-disposed; and, thank God, we are all well. I can stay no longer than to hope that you are both so, and happy (see how disinterested I am!); that Reeves and the dear Paphy are so too; and that you will love me, and believe me, with the warmest and truest affection, unalterably and gratefully yours,

"S. Siddons."

"My whole family desire the kindest remembrances. We have bought a house in Gower Street, Bedford

Square; the back of it is most effectually in the country and delightfully pleasant.

"God bless you, my dear Mrs. Whalley! How perfectly do I see you at this moment; and you, too, my dear friend, for it is impossible to separate your images in my mind. Pray write to me soon, and give me another instance of your unwearied kindness. Adieu!"

We can see how bruised and sore her heart is. For the moment she thinks all are conspiring to betray her.

The Mr. Pratt she alludes to was a Bath bookseller and dramatist, much admired by his townsmen. This admiration was not shared by the managers of Drury Lane, who would not allow Mrs. Siddons to act in his drama the first year she appeared. She had already sacrificed herself to a failure, *The Fatal Interview*, which had really injured her professional reputation. Pratt maintained, however, she might have done him this service had she been so minded. She herself writes kindly of the aspirant to fame, but we can see his cause of irritation.

"Your letter," she writes in 1783 to Dr. Whalley, "to poor Pratty is lying on the table by me, and I am selfish enough to grudge it him from the bottom of my heart, and yet I will not; for just now, poor soul, he wants much comfort; therefore, let him take it, and God bless him with it!"

And again:—

"*The Fatal Interview* has been played three times, and is quite done with; it was the dullest of all representations. Pratty's Epilogue was vastly applauded indeed. I shall take care how I get into such another play; but I fancy the managers will take

care of that, too. *They won't let me play in Pratty's comedy.*"

All this shows us how often she was the victim of undeserved resentment on the part of slighted authors, and how, very often, the fact of doing a kindness got her into trouble. She had accepted *The Fatal Interview*, and now Pratt thought himself aggrieved that she would not do the same for him. Most likely at any other time she would have shrugged her shoulders at Pratt's machinations, but everything now hurt her wounded sensibilities.

"I must beg you will not mention (I believe I am giving an unnecessary caution) anything I have told you concerning Mr. Pratt. I would not wish him to know, by any means, that I have been informed of his last unkindness, because it might prevent his asking me to do him a favour, which I shall be at all times ready to grant, when in my power. I must tell you that after the very unkind letter he sent me, in answer to mine requesting the ten pounds, I never wrote to or heard from him until about three months ago, when he wrote to me as if he had never offered such an indignity, recommending a work he had just finished to my attention. He did not tell me what this work was, but I had heard it was a tragedy. To be made a convenient acquaintance only, did not much gratify me; but, however, I wrote to say he knew the resolution I had been obliged to make (having made many enemies by reading some, and not being able to give time to read all tragedies) to read nobody's tragedy, and then no one could take offence; but that if it were accepted by the managers, and there was anything that I could be of service to him in (doing justice to myself), that I should be very happy to serve him. I have heard

nothing of him since that time till within these few days, when he wrote to my sister Fanny, accusing me of ingratitude, and calling himself the ladder upon which I have mounted to fame, and which I am kicking down.

"What he means by ingratitude I am at a loss to guess, and I fancy he would be puzzled to explain; our obligations were always, I believe, pretty mutual. However, in this letter to Fanny, he says he is going to publish a poem called *Gratitude*, in which he means to show my avarice and meanness, and all the rest of my amiable qualities to the world, for having dropped him. as he calls it, so injuriously, and banishing him my house. Now, as I hope for mercy, I permitted his visits at my house, after having discovered that he was taking every possible method to attach my sister to him, which, you may be sure, he took pains to conceal from us, and I had him to my parties long after I made this discovery.

"In short, till he chose to write this letter, which I disdained to reply to, he called as usual. He had the modesty to desist from calling on us from that time, and now has the goodness to throw this unmerited obloquy on me. I am so well convinced that a very plain tale will put him down, that his intentions give me very little concern. I am only grieved to see such daily instances of folly and wickedness in human nature.

"It is worth observing, too, that at the very time he chose to write this agreeable letter, I was using my best influences with Mr. Siddons to lend him the money I told you of before. I find he thinks it is not very prudent to quarrel with me, but has the effrontery to think that I should make advances toward our recon-

cilement; but I will die first. 'My towering virtue, from the assurance of my merit, scorns to stoop so low.' If he should come round of himself (for I have learnt that best of knowledge to forgive) I will, out of respect for what I believe he once was, be of what service I can to him, for I believe he meant well at one time, when I knew him first, and the noblest vengeance is the most complete. Once more, your fingers on your lips, I pray."

We should like to see less mention of benefits bestowed, the ten pounds not mentioned; but this letter is a good specimen of the manner in which she was worried by applicants, and shows how impossible it was for her to satisfy them all.

The next is a regular eighteenth-century four-pager, but is so characteristic, and so sincere and full of affection, that we cannot help quoting it at the end of this chapter, as the best assurance of her possession of that heart her enemies declared she did not possess.

"Mrs. Wapshawe has been so good as to bestow half an hour upon me. She speaks of you as I should speak of you—as if she could not find words, and as if her sentiments could not enough honour you both. If you could look into the hearts of people, trust me, my beloved and ever lamented friends, you would be convinced that mine yearns after you with increasing and unutterable affection. See there now—how have I expressed myself? That is always the way with me: when I speak or write to you, it is always so inadequately, that I don't do justice to myself; for I thank God that I have a soul capable of loving you, and trust I shall find an advocate in your bosom to assist my inability and simpleness. You know me of old for a matter-of-fact woman.

"Mrs. Wapshawe has revived my hopes. She tells me that you will return sooner than I hoped. Now I'll begin my cottage again. It has been lying in heaps a great while, and I have shed many tears over the ruins; but we will build it up again in joy. You know the spot that I have fixed upon, and I trust I have not forgotten the plan!

"Oh! what a reward for all that I have suffered, to retire to the blessings of your society; for, indeed, my dear friends, I have paid severely for my eminence, and have smarted with the undeserved pain that should attend the guilty only; but it is the fate of office, and the rough brake that virtue must go through; and sweet, 'sweet are the uses of adversity.' I kiss the rod.

"Mrs. Wapshawe was quite delighted with Mr. Beach's picture of you; but she tells me that you wear coloured clothes and lace ruffles; and I valued my picture more, if possible, for standing the test of such a change as these (to me unusual) ornaments must necessarily make in you. I think I shall long to strip you of these trappings.

"I am so attached to the garments I have been used to see you wear, and think they harmonize so well with your face and person, that I should wish them like their dear wearer, who is without change. I am proud of your chiding, though God knows how unwillingly I would give you a moment's pain; nay, more, He knows that I neither go to bed, nor offer prayers for blessings at His hands, in which your welfare does not make an ardent petition. But why should I wound your friendly bosoms with the relation of my vexations? I knew you too well to suppose you could hear of my distresses without feeling them too poignantly.

"I resolved to write when I had overcome my enemies. You shall always share my joys, but suffer me to keep my griefs from your knowledge. Now I am triumphant, the favourite of the public again; and now you hear from me.

"A strange capricious master is the public. However, one consolation greater than any other, except one's own approbation, has been that those whose suffrages I esteemed most have, through all my troubles, clasped me closer to their hearts; they have been the touchstone to prove who were really my friends. You will believe me when I affirm that your friendship, and my dear Mrs. Whalley's, is an honour and a happiness I would not forego for any earthly consideration. Tell my dearest Mrs. Whalley that neither avocations nor indolence would have prevented your hearing from me long ago but for the reasons already mentioned. I wrote to you last Sunday, when I had not received your dear letters; so you will do me the justice to remember that I was not reminded of you but by my own heart, which, while it beats, will ever love you both with the warmest and truest affection; however, as she is so seldom mistaken, we shall have the honour and glory of laughing at her. Would to God I could laugh with, or cry with, or anything with you, but for half an hour! To say the truth, though, your tender reproaches gave me a melancholy which I could not (and I don't know if I wished it) shake off. Pray let me hear from you very soon, and very often. I shall be a better woman, and more worthy of your invaluable friendship, the more I converse with you. Surely the converse of good and gentle spirits is the nearest approach to Heaven that we can know; therefore, once more I beg that I may

often hear from you, and, if you do love me, do not think so unworthily of me as to suppose my affection can, in the nature of things, ever know the least abatement. I conjure you both to promise me this, for I cannot bear it—indeed, I can't!"

CHAPTER VIII.

LADY MACBETH.

Contemporaneous critics are unanimous in declaring Lady Macbeth to be Mrs. Siddons's finest impersonation, and it is with this *rôle* that we always connect the Great Actress. She made the part her own, and identified herself with it in the memories of all who saw her. It is essentially in Lady Macbeth that Shakespeare proves himself so thoroughly Anglo-Saxon; the whole conception of the person is Teutonic. The idea of the remorse-haunted murderess, with her despairing fatalism and unswerving ambition, is more nearly allied to "Vala," in the Scandinavian mythology, than anything in the tragedies of Sophocles or Euripides, and this it is that rendered Mrs. Siddons so perfect an embodiment of the character. She was essentially Teutonic in her grandeur, her stateliness, and, at the same time, sustained energy and vitality. Rachel had moments of superhuman grandeur and ferocity, but they only flashed for a moment; hers was the turning-point of passion

of the Latin race, but not the voluminous grandeur, gaining strength, like a mighty river, as it rolls along, which distinguishes the heroic emotions of the Teuton.

In studying the annals of genius, it is interesting to observe how circumstances working from within force it on and bring it to completion, how circumstances working from without mould it into form, tempering the fine metal until it is supple and adaptable, but breaking the inferior metal by the sheer weight of their inexorable pressure.

Had Mrs. Siddons remained the brilliant, beautiful girl, with life undimmed by clouds, without experience of the bitterness and sorrow of life, she never could have acted Lady Macbeth. In her impetuous indignation at first, she herself said that never again would "she present herself before that audience that had treated her so savagely"; but the greater spirit within reasserted itself, and her genius emerged from the trial strengthened and expanded by a larger range of emotion and experience.

With her increased knowledge of life, the actress was enabled to form a more vivid conception of the character. She was naturally intensely masterful, determined, and ambitious, undaunted in peril. She had toiled, and attained the highest point of her ambition. She had known the incentives of distinction, worldly power, applause, yet she remained a woman, passionate and wayward in her affections to the last; and this is the view, seen through the medium of her own character, that she took of Lady Macbeth, and it was through her lofty impersonation of ambition in its highest and most sublimated form that she moved her audience to terror, and by this womanly tenderness

that she moved them to sympathy and pity for the murderess of Banquo.

Mrs. Siddons had studied the part of Lady Macbeth when little more than a girl. She gives us a graphic account of the first time she learnt it for the purposes of stage representation :—

"It was my custom to study my characters at night, when all the domestic care and business were over. On the night preceding that in which I was to appear in this part for the first time, I shut myself up as usual, when all the family were retired, and commenced my study of Lady Macbeth. As the character is very short, I thought I should soon accomplish it. Being then only twenty years of age, I believed, as many others do believe, that little more was necessary than to get the words into my head; for the necessity of discrimination, and the development of character, at that time of my life, had scarcely entered into my imagination. But to proceed. I went on with tolerable composure, in the silence of the night (a night I never can forget), till I came to the assassination scene, when the horrors of the scene rose to a degree that made it impossible for me to get farther. I snatched up my candle, and hurried out of the room in a paroxysm of terror. My dress was of silk, and the rustling of it, as I ascended the stairs to go to bed, seemed to my panic-struck fancy like the movement of a spectre pursuing me. At last I reached my chamber, where I found my husband fast asleep. I clapt my candlestick down upon the table, without the power of putting the candle out, and I threw myself on my bed without daring to stay even to take off my clothes. At peep of day I rose to resume my task; but so little did I know of my part when I appeared

in it at night, that my shame and confusion cured me of procrastinating my business for the remainder of my life."

People afterwards were inclined to find her formal and sententious, and even denied her sensibility off the stage; but it is impossible to read the account of the manner in which she entered into her parts, and how they took hold of her in her early days of work, without feeling that she had depths of pathos and sympathy in her disposition undreamt of by those who met her later when, under a dignified tragic manner, she had hidden her youthful spontaneity of feeling. We have only need of the evidence of the actors she acted with to see how deeply she entered into her part.

Miss Kelly said that when, as Constance, Mrs. Siddons wept over her, her collar was wet with her tears. Tom Davies is said to have declared that in the third act of the *Fair Penitent* she "turned pale under her rouge." She tells us herself that "when called upon to personate the character of Constance, I never, from the beginning of the play to the end of my part in it, once suffered my dressing-room door to be closed, in order that my attention might be constantly fixed on those distressing events which, by this means, I could plainly hear going on upon the stage, the terrible effects of which progress were to be represented by me. Moreover, I never omitted to place myself, with Arthur in my hand, to hear the march, when, upon the reconciliation of England and France, they enter the gates of Angiers to ratify the contract of marriage between the Dauphin and the Lady Blanche, because the sickening sounds of that march would usually cause the bitter tears of rage, disappointment, betrayed confidence, baffled ambition, and, above all, the

agonizing feelings of maternal affection to gush into my eyes."

As a set-off against the above statement, we have Cumberland's description of Mrs. Siddons coming off the stage in the full flush of triumph—having harrowed her audience with emotion—and walking up to the mirror in the green room to survey herself with perfect composure.

We imagine there is no law to be laid down on the subject of the amount of feeling an actor really puts into the part he is enacting. It must vary. Conventionality must, with the greatest of them, now and then take the place of emotion; or, as Talma expresses it, the "*Métier* must now and then take the place of *Le vrai.*"

We know the story of how once, when Garrick was playing King Lear, Johnson and Murphy kept up an animated conversation at the side-wing during one of his most important scenes. When Garrick came over the stage, he said, "You two talk so loud you destroy all my feelings." "Prithee," replied Johnson, "do not talk of feelings; Punch has no feeling"—a remark which is borne out by another account of Garrick as Lear rising from the dead body of his daughter Cordelia, where he had been convulsing the audience with sobs, running into the green-room gobbling like a turkey to amuse Kitty Clive and Mrs. Abington.

Mrs. Siddons is said to have made the statement that, after playing the part of Lady Macbeth for thirty years, she never read it over without discovering in it something new. In her *Remarks*, however, on the character, left amongst her memoranda, we do not find any particular depth or originality in her conception, and we doubt if she ever improved much on her first ideal.

As to her notion that Lady Macbeth was a small, fair, blue-eyed woman, delicate and fragile, it could have been but a "caprice" of later days, originating in her endeavour to find new readings and impressions:

A short analysis of some of her opinions on the character may be interesting.

"In this astonishing creature," she says, "one sees a woman in whose bosom the passion of ambition has almost obliterated all the characteristics of human nature; in whose composition are associated all the subjugating powers of intellect, and all the charms and graces of personal beauty. You will probably not agree with me as to the character of that beauty; yet, perhaps, this difference of opinion will be entirely attributable to the difficulty of your imagination disengaging itself from that idea of the person of her representative which you have been so long accustomed to contemplate. According to my notion, it is of that character which, I believe, is generally allowed to be most captivating to the other sex—fair, feminine, nay, perhaps, even fragile—

> Fair as the forms that, wove in Fancy's loom,
> Float in light visions round the poet's head.

"Such a combination only—respectable in energy and strength of mind, and captivating in feminine loveliness—could have composed a charm of such potency as to fascinate the mind of a hero so dauntless, a character so amiable, so honourable as Macbeth, to seduce him to brave all the dangers of the present and all the terrors of a future world; and we are constrained, even whilst we abhor his crimes, to pity the infatuated victim of such a thraldom.

"His letters, which have informed her of the predictions of those preternatural beings who accosted

him on the heath, have lighted up into daring and desperate determinations all those pernicious slumbering fires which the enemy of man is ever watchful to awaken in the bosoms of his unwary victims. To his direful suggestions she is so far from offering the least opposition, as not only to yield up her soul to them, but, moreover, to invoke the sightless ministers of remorseful cruelty to extinguish in her breast all those compunctious visitings of nature which otherwise might have been mercifully interposed to counteract, and, perhaps, eventually to overcome, their unholy instigations. But, having impiously delivered herself up to the excitement of hell, the pitifulness of heaven itself is withdrawn from her, and she is abandoned to the guidance of the demons whom she invoked. Lady Macbeth, thus adorned with every fascination of mind and person, enters for the first time, reading a part of those portentous letters from her husband.

"'They met me in the day of success; and I have learnt by the perfectest report they have more in them than mortal knowledge. When I burnt with desire to question them further, they made themselves into thin air, into which they vanished. Whilst I stood wrapt in the wonder of it, came missives from the King, who all-hailed me "Thane of Cawdor," by which title before these sisters had saluted me, and referred me to the coming on of time with "Hail, King that shall be!" This I have thought good to deliver thee, my dearest partner of greatness, that thou mightest not lose the dues of rejoicing, by being ignorant of what greatness is promised. Lay it to thy heart, and farewell.'

"Now vaulting ambition and intrepid daring, rekindle in a moment all the splendours of her dark blue

eyes. She fatally resolves that Glamis and Cawdor shall be also that which the mysterious agents of the Evil One have promised."

Lady Macbeth then gives the wonderful analysis of her husband's character, "Yet I do fear thy nature is too full of the milk of human kindness to catch the nearest way"; proving him to be of a temper so irresolute as to require "all the efforts, all the excitement, which her uncontrollable spirit and her unbounded influence over him can perform."

"When Macbeth appears, she seems so insensible to everything but the horrible design which has probably been suggested to her by his letters, as to have entirely forgotten both the one and the other. It is very remarkable that Macbeth is frequent in expressions of tenderness to his wife, while she never betrays one symptom of affection towards him, till, in the fiery furnace of affliction, her iron heart is melted down to softness." This was the side by which Mrs. Siddons had taken such a grasp of the character of Lady Macbeth. It was by bringing into prominence this softer side of her character that, while thrilling her audience with horror, she at the same time brought tears to their eyes with an immense awe-struck pity. She always held their interest by the human touches which she brought into as much prominence as possible.

Alluding to the lines :—

> I have given suck, and know
> How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me,

she says: "Even here, horrified as she is, she shows herself made by ambition, but not by nature, a perfectly savage creature. The very use of such a tender allusion in the midst of her dreadful language, per-

suades one unequivocally that she has really felt the maternal yearnings of a mother towards her babe, and that she considered this action the most enormous that ever required the strength of human nerves for its perpetration. Her language to Macbeth is the most potently eloquent that guilt could use. It is only in soliloquy that she invokes the powers of hell to unsex her. To her husband she avows, and the naturalness of her language makes us believe her, that she had felt the instinct of filial as well as maternal love. But she makes her very virtues the means of a taunt to her lord: 'You have the milk of human kindness in your heart,' she says (in substance) to him, 'but ambition, which is my ruling passion, would be also yours if you had courage. With a hankering desire to suppress, if you could, all your weaknesses of sympathy, you are too cowardly to will the deed, and can only dare to wish it. You speak of sympathies and feelings. I, too, have felt with a tenderness which your sex cannot know; but I am resolute in my ambition to trample on all that obstructs my way to a crown. Look to me, and be ashamed of your weakness."

"In the tremendous suspense of these moments" (when Duncan sleeps), Mrs. Siddons again tells us, "while she recollects her habitual humanity, one trait of tender feelings is expressed: 'Had he not resembled my father as he slept, I had done it.'"

Through many pages Mrs. Siddons thus gives us her views of the character of Lady Macbeth; sometimes verging on a pomposity that is almost Johnsonese. Her later criticisms of the parts in which she acted, bear out the statement that hers was not an intellectual power that strengthened or expanded after the "middle of the road of life." This year, 1785, saw

her great triumph. But we doubt if she had not already mastered the idea of chilling and terrifying her audience when, as she describes, she worked herself into a paroxysm of terror on first studying the part as a young girl. The physical power and confidence to communicate that terror were hers now, but the intellectual comprehension had been there before, and certainly did not increase; on the contrary, it deteriorated with years. The power of fresh comprehension passed away, and with it the elasticity and variety of her earlier effects; and from being singularly simple and direct, she became stagey and artificial. An artist gets certain words to utter; he gets the skeleton sketch, as it were, of the character he has to portray, but the emphasis and passion he puts into them, which go direct from his heart to the heart of his audience, must be his, and his alone, and must be as little as possible the effect of study or deliberation. Thus the ingredients of terror, ambition, and wifely and maternal love, were the uncomplex emotions at first impressed on Mrs. Siddons's brain by the study of the part; and those were the predominating influences by which she swayed her audience to the last day she acted it.

Many are the records that we have of this great performance—all the world has heard of the Lady Macbeth of Mrs. Siddons—but, alas! how insufficient are they to give us an idea of the wondrous reality. The weird-like tones, that sent an involuntary shudder through the house; the bewildered melancholy; and, lastly, the piteous cry of the strong heart broken, have come down to us as traditions; but the grandeur of her majesty, the earnest accents as the demon of the character took possession of her, must ever remain

an unknown sensation to us. One who saw her once act it from the side scenes, with the disillusion of red ochre, that was daubed on by her maid under his eyes; her whisper, which Christopher North eloquently termed "the escaping sighs and moans of the bared soul"; her face, the terrible mixture of hope, apprehension, and resolution, gave him a sickly feeling of reality. His tongue clave to the roof of his mouth, in spite of the evidence of his eyes that the assassination was a piece of mechanical trickery in which the paint-pot played a conspicuous part. If a detective had made his appearance at the moment, he declares he would immediately have given himself up as *particeps criminis*, accessory before and after the event. The whole fiction, so inimitably played and so powerfully described, had kicked fact and reason off the throne.

But we must return to the first night. It was the 2nd of February. All the intellect and fashion of the town were present: Burke, Fox, Wyndham, Gibbon, in the front row, and, above all, Sir Joshua Reynolds, who took a particular interest in her performance of the character. He had a seat in the orchestra, where he was privileged to sit on account of his deafness. He had constantly urged her to act Lady Macbeth before, and had designed her dress for the sleep-walking scene. Needless to say that her usual nervousness was magnified tenfold. All had declared her incapable of rendering the grander plays of Shakespeare. She had reached, they maintained, the highest point which she was capable of attaining, and her straining higher was simply presumption. She knew, therefore, that if she had been criticised before, the observations now would be much more severe. The representation of the other parts also did not satisfy

her. Smith, popularly known as "Gentleman Smith" because he generally did the light and airy part of lover in comedy parts, was the Macbeth, Brereton the Macduff, and Bensley the Banquo; and the memory of the popularity of Mrs. Pritchard in the part, seemed to stand between her and her audience. She had already begged Dr. Johnson to let her know his opinion of Mrs. Pritchard, whom she had never seen, and she tells us in her *Autograph Recollections* that he answered:—

"'Madam, she was a vulgar idiot; she used to speak of her "gownd," and she never read any part in a play in which she acted except her own. She no more thought of the play out of which her part was taken than a shoemaker thinks of the skin out of which the piece of leather of which he is making a pair of shoes is cut.' Is it possible, thought I, that Mrs. Pritchard, the greatest of all the Lady Macbeths, should never have read the play? and I concluded that the Doctor must have been misinformed; but I was afterwards assured by a gentleman, a friend of Mrs. Pritchard, that he had supped with her one night after she had acted Lady Macbeth, and that she declared she had never perused the whole tragedy. I cannot believe it."

It would seem difficult to such a worker as Mrs. Siddons to conceive the possibility of a woman not mastering the whole play if she had to act the part of Lady Macbeth, but we think Dr. Johnson must have been too severe when he called an actress who for years had held the stage with Garrick "a vulgar idiot." And there is little doubt that the tradition of her acting in the part of Lady Macbeth still had a firm hold on the memory of the audience. As a proof of this

we will here quote an incident that occurred the first night:—

"Just as I had finished my toilette, and was pondering with fearfulness my first appearance in the grand fiendish part, comes Mr. Sheridan knocking at my door, and insisting, in spite of all my entreaties not to be interrupted at this tremendous moment, to be admitted. He would not be denied admittance, for he protested he must speak to me on a circumstance which so deeply concerned my own interest, that it was of the most serious nature. Well, after much squabbling I was compelled to admit him, that I might dismiss him the sooner, and compose myself before the play began.

"But what was my distress and astonishment when I found that he wanted me, even at this moment of anxiety and terror, to adopt another mode of acting the sleeping scene! He told me that he had heard with the greatest surprise and concern that I meant to act it without holding the candle in my hand; and when I argued the impracticability of washing out that 'damned spot' that was certainly implied by both her own words and those of her gentlewoman, he insisted that if I did put the candle out of my hand it would be thought a presumptuous innovation, as Mrs. Pritchard had always retained it in hers. My mind, however, was made up, and it was then too late to make me alter it, for I was too agitated to adopt another method. My deference for Mr. Sheridan's taste and judgment was, however, so great, that, had he proposed the alteration whilst it was possible for me to change my own plan, I should have yielded to his suggestion; though even then it would have been against my own opinion, and my observation of the

accuracy with which somnambulists perform all the acts of waking persons.

"The scene, of course, was acted as I had myself conceived it, and the innovation, as Mr. Sheridan called it, was received with approbation. Mr. Sheridan himself came to me after the play, and most ingenuously congratulated me on my obstinacy."

Let us try to recall the vision of Mrs. Siddons as she acted Lady Macbeth that night. It was in 1785. She was thirty years of age. The "timid tottering girl," who had first appeared as Portia on that stage, was now a queenly woman, in the full meridian of her stately beauty. Success had developed her intellectually and physically, and she walked the stage in the plenitude of her power, almost like some superhuman being.

Her dress in the first and second acts was a heavy black robe, with a broad border, which ran from her shoulders down to her feet, of the most vivid crimson, over which fell a long white veil. In the third she changed this costume for another black dress, with great gold bands lacing it across, and gold ornaments round her neck and in her hair. Both of these dresses strike us as being "stagey," but she never had the art of dressing herself; so great, however, was her power, that all minor accessories of dress and scenery were forgotten. For the sleep-walking scene Sir Joshua had designed clouds of white drapery swathing the pale drawn face; they lent an appalling weirdness to her appearance, whilst the glassy stare she managed to throw into her eyes completed the horror.

The audience were spellbound; they only saw that woe-worn face, and heard that voice, broken with agony and remorse. It was a night of nights, for her

and them, and yet no applause, no success, turned her from concentration on the purpose and issue of her art.

"While standing up before my glass," she tells us, "and taking off my mantle, a diverting circumstance occurred to chase away the feelings of the anxious night, for, *while I was repeating, and endeavouring to call to mind the appropriate tone and action to the following words*, 'Here 's the smell of blood still,' my dresser innocently exclaimed, 'Dear me, Ma'am, how very hysterical you are to-night! I protest and vow, Ma'am, it was not blood, but rose-pink and water; for I saw the property-man mix it up with my own eyes.'"

These were, indeed, the palmy days of the English stage. With a self-collected, courageous energy, artists then saw and recognised the greatest, and strained every nerve to attain it. Scenic effect was of minor importance; the development of mental action, the portrayal of passion, were the end and aim of the actor's art, to which everything else was subsidiary. They spent years upon the evolving of one heroic conception, not with regard to its details of upholstery and scene-painting, but with regard to the presentment of the poet's imagination which they undertook to represent.

CHAPTER IX.

FRIENDS.

Needless to say that in those days, when genius was worshipped and the entrance to the most exclusive circles of society accorded to talent of every description, the social homage paid to Mrs. Siddons was of the most enthusiastic description, passing sometimes the bounds of good taste. The door of the lodgings she occupied in the Strand the first year she acted was soon beset by various persons quite unknown to her, some of whom actually forced their way into her drawing-room, in spite of remonstrance or opposition.

This was as inconvenient as it was offensive; for as she usually acted three times a week, and had, besides, to attend the rehearsals, she had but little time to spend unnecessarily. None were more capable, however, than she of keeping vulgar curiosity at a respectful distance. She gives us a comic account of an interview that took place between her and some of these intrusive individuals:—

"One morning, though I had previously given orders not to be interrupted, my servant entered the room in a great hurry, saying, 'Ma'am, I am very

sorry to tell you there are some ladies below who say they must see you, and it is impossible for me to prevent it. I have told them over and over again that you are particularly engaged, but all in vain, and now, Ma'am, you may actually hear them on the stairs.' I felt extremely indignant at such unparalleled impertinence, and, before the servant had done speaking to me, a tall, elegant, invalid-looking person presented herself (whom, I am afraid, I did not receive very graciously), and after her four more, in slow succession. A very awkward silence took place. Presently the first lady spoke. 'You must think it strange,' she said, 'to see a person entirely unknown to you intrude in this manner upon your privacy; but, you must know, I am in a very delicate state of health, and my physician won't let me go to the theatre to see you, so I am come to look at you here.' She accordingly sat down to look, and I to be looked at, for a few painful moments, when she arose and apologised." There is something awful that sends a cold shiver through us as the Tragic Muse tells us, "I was in no humour to overlook such insolence, and so let her depart in silence." We can picture her contemptuous scorn under the circumstances. But it was not only in her own home she had to pay the penalty of fame; the theatre was mobbed outside every evening by a crowd anxious to see her walk across the pavement to her carriage; her dresses were copied, and the dressmakers to whom she went were importuned to make for all the fashionable ladies. Not only in these early days, but all her life, Mrs. Siddons kept a position unexampled for one of her profession. The house she occupied in Gore Street during her second season was, when she entertained,

filled with all that was brilliant in literature and fashion; and later at Westbourne Cottage, and when she was in Pall Mall, Campbell tells us of rows of "coaches and chairs" standing outside her door. Invitations to most of the great houses in London poured in upon her, and she herself gives a comic account of the manner in which she was mobbed by her fashionable devotees at an assembly at the erratic Miss Monkton's (afterwards Lady Cork), one of the "Blues" who made oddity of dress, appearance, and manner a study, and the running after "notorious folk" a science.

The young actress had steadily declined many invitations, feeling that the moments snatched from her profession ought to be devoted to the care of her children. Miss Monkton, however, insisted on her coming one Sunday evening, assuring her that there would only be some half-a-dozen friends to meet her.

"The appointed Sunday evening came. I went to her very nearly in undress, at the early hour of eight, on account of my little boy, whom she desired me to bring with me, more for effect, I suspect, than for his *beaux yeux*. I found with her, as I had been taught to expect, three or four ladies of my acquaintance; and the time passed in agreeable conversation, till I had remained much longer than I had apprehended.

"I was, of course, preparing speedily to return home, when incessantly repeated thunderings at the door, and the sudden influx of such a throng of people as I had never before seen collected in any private house, counteracted every attempt that I could make for escape. I was therefore obliged, in a state of indescribable mortification, to sit quietly down till I know

not what hour in the morning; but for hours before my departure the room I sat in was so painfully crowded that the people absolutely stood on the chairs, round the walls, that they might look over their neighbours' heads to stare at me; and if it had not been for the benevolent politeness of Mr. Erskine, who had been acquainted with my arrangement, I know not what weakness I might have been surprised into, especially being tormented, as I was, by the ridiculous interrogations of some learned ladies who were called 'Blues,' the meaning of which title I did not at that time appreciate; much less did I comprehend the meaning of the greater part of their learned talk. These profound ladies, however, furnished much amusement to the town for many weeks after—nay, I believe I might say for the whole winter. Glad enough was I at length to find myself at peace in my own bed-chamber."

Dr. Doran makes this scene take place at Mrs. Montagu's; but besides the victim's own account of this remarkable evening, that gives such a picture of the times, we have those of Cumberland and of Miss Burney. Cumberland, in the *Observer*, disguising the people under feigned names, tells us:—

I now joined a cluster of people who had crowded round an actress who sat upon a sofa leaning on her elbow in a pensive attitude, and seemed to be counting the sticks of her fan, whilst they were vieing with each other in the most extravagant encomiums.

"You were adorable last night in Belvidera," says a pert young parson with a high toupée. "I sat in Lady Blubber's box, and I can assure you she, and her daughters, too, wept most bitterly. But then that charming mad scene—but, by my soul, it was a *chef d'œuvre*! Pray, Madam, give me leave to ask you, was you really in your senses?"

"I strove to do it as well as I could," answered the actress.

"Do you intend to play comedy next season?" says a lady, stepping up to her with great eagerness.

"I shall do as the manager bids me," she replied.

"I should be curious to know," says an elderly lady, "which part, Madam, you yourself esteem the best you play?"

"I shall always endeavour to make that which I am about the best."

An elegant and enchanting young woman of fashion now took her turn of interrogating, and, with many apologies, begged to be informed by her if she studied those enchanting looks and attitudes before a glass?

"I never study anything but my author."

"Then you practise them at rehearsals?" rejoined the questioner.

"I seldom rehearse at all."

"She has fine eyes," says a tragic poet to an eminent painter.

Vanessa now came up, and, desiring leave to introduce a young muse to Melpomene, presented a girl in a white frock, with a fillet of flowers tied round her hair, which hung down her back in flowing curls. The young muse made a low obeisance, and, with the most unembarrassed voice and countenance, whilst the poor actress was covered in blushes, and suffering torture from the eyes of all in the room, broke forth as follows:—

"O thou, whom Nature calls her own,
Pride of the stage and favourite of the town!"

Miss Burney, who was present, also contributes her account of what took place:—

My father and I were both engaged to Miss Monckton's; so was Sir Joshua, who accompanied us. We found Mrs. Siddons, the actress, there. She is a woman of excellent character, and, therefore, I am very glad she is thus patronised, since Mrs. Abington, and so many frail fair ones, have been thus noticed by the great. She behaved with great propriety, very calm, modest, quiet, and unaffected. She has a very fine countenance, and her eyes look both intelligent and soft. She has, however, a steadiness in her manner and deportment by no means engaging. Mrs. Thrale, who was there, said:

"Why, this is a leaden goddess we are all worshipping; however, we shall soon gild it."

A lady who sat near me then began a dialogue with Mr. Erskine, who had placed himself exactly opposite to Mrs. Siddons, and they debated together upon her manner of studying her parts, disputing upon the point with great warmth, yet not only forbearing to ask Mrs. Siddons herself which was right, but quite overpowering her with their loquacity when she attempted, unasked, to explain the matter. Most vehement praise of all she did followed, and the lady turned to me and said:

"What invitation, Miss Burney, is here for genius to display itself? Everybody, I hear, is at work for Mrs. Siddons; but if you would work for her, what an inducement to excel you would both of you have. Dr. Burney——"

"Oh, pray, Madam," cried I, "don't say to him——"

"Oh, but I will. If my influence can do you any mischief you may depend upon having it."

She then repeated what she had said to my father, and he instantly said:

"Your ladyship may be sure of my interest."

I whispered afterwards to know who she was, and heard she was Lady Lucan.*

It is amusing to see how conceited Fanny Burney always must turn every incident to herself. When she did work for Mrs. Siddons, the play was received with roars of laughter, and acted but one night.

We find a clue in the above description to Mrs. Siddons's unpopularity. Little Burney, with the frizzled head, and Mrs. Thrale, who "skipped about like a young kid, all vivacity and sprightliness," could not understand the "steadiness in her manner," and her dignified way of checking intrusive admirers. No one appreciated admiration and love from her intimate friends more than Mrs. Siddons, but to the adoration of general society she was icy cold.

Sir Joshua Reynolds frequently went to see her act, and she was a welcome guest at the house in Leicester Fields.

"He approved," she writes, "very much of my costumes, and of my hair without powder, which at that time was used in great profusion, with a reddish brown tint, and a great quantity of pomatum, which,

* It was the same Lady Lucan who was said once to have asked the actress: "Pray, Madam, when you are to prepare yourself in a character, what is your *primary object* of attention, the *superstructure*, as it may be called, or the 'foundation' of the part?"

well kneaded together, modelled the fair ladies' tresses into large curls like demi-cannon. My locks were generally braided into a small compass, so as to ascertain the size and shape of my head, which to a painter's eye was, of course, an agreeable departure from the mode. My short waist, too, was to him a pleasing contrast to the long stiff stays and hoop petticoats which were then the fashion, even on the stage, and it obtained his unqualified approbation. He always sat in the orchestra; and in that place were to be seen—O glorious constellation!—Burke, Gibbon, Sheridan, and Windham."

It was at Reynolds's she first met Edmund Burke. The story goes that she was reading Milton for the benefit of the company, when she heard the great orator's deep melodious tones repeat, as she closed the book, the lines beginning with "The angel ceased." That wonderful face, full of fiery power, was to be seen amongst those surrounding her. He was afterwards frequently present while she sat to Reynolds for her portrait. She ever counted mercurial Sheridan as a friend, in spite of the way in which he treated her. She loved his beautiful, gentle wife, and some of her happiest hours were spent in their society. She there put off all her stateliness, and became the joyous-hearted young girl of the old Bath days.

Sir Thomas Lawrence cherished all his life a feeling that was almost akin to adoration for Mrs. Siddons's genius and beauty. He painted her and John Kemble in every dress and every pose. He was engaged subsequently to two of her daughters, first one and then the other. He proposed to the eldest daughter, Sarah; was accepted; but, before long, became miserable and dejected, and at last confessed to Mrs. Siddons that he

had mistaken his feelings—that her younger daughter, and not the elder, was the object of his affection. Fanny Kemble says :—

Sarah gave up her lover, and he became engaged to the second, Maria. Both, however, died of consumption. Maria, the youngest, an exceedingly beautiful girl, died first, and on her death-bed made her sister promise that she would never marry Lawrence. The death of her daughters broke off all connection between Sir Thomas Lawrence and my aunt, and from that time they never saw or had any intercourse with one another. Yet not long after this Mrs. Siddons, dining with us one day, asked my mother how the sketch Lawrence was making of me was getting on. After my mother's reply, my aunt remained silent for some time, and then, laying her hand on my father's arm, said: "Charles, when I die, I wish to be carried to my grave by you and Lawrence."

Lawrence reached his grave when she was yet tottering on the brink of hers.

On my twentieth birthday, which occurred soon after my first appearance, Lawrence sent me a magnificent proof plate of my aunt as the "Tragic Muse," beautifully framed, and with this inscription: "This portrait, by England's greatest painter, of the noblest subject of his pencil, is presented to her niece and *worthy successor* by her most faithful humble friend and servant, Lawrence." When my mother saw this, she exclaimed at it, and said: "I am surprised he ever brought himself to write those words 'worthy successor.'"

A few days after, Lawrence begged me to let him have the print again, as he was not satisfied with the finish of the frame. It was sent to him, and when it came back he had effaced the words in which he had admitted any worthy successor to his "Tragic Muse"; and Mr. H——, who was at that time his secretary, told me that Lawrence had the print lying with that inscription in his drawing-room for several days before sending it to me, and had said to him, "I cannot bear to look at it."

Among these artists, poets, statesmen, who were continually present at her representations and attended afterwards at her dressing-room door to pay their respects, in later years Byron might frequently be seen. He declared her to be the "*beau ideal* of acting," and said, "Miss O'Neill I would not see for fear of weakening the impression made by the queen of trage-

dians. When I read Lady Macbeth's part I have Mrs. Siddons before me, and imagination even supplies her voice, whose tones were superhuman and power over the heart supernatural." On another occasion, he is reported to have said that of actors Cook was the most natural, Kemble the most supernatural, and Kean the medium between the two, but that Mrs. Siddons was worth them all put together.

The first year she acted, "the gentlemen of the bar adorned her brows with laurel," as she says herself. The "laurel" took the substantial form of a hundred guineas and a wreath presented by two barristers. She declared it to be the most shining circumstance of her life, and alluded modestly to her "poor abilities" and insufficient claims. The gentlemen of Brookes's Club also made up a handsome present.

"Mrs. Siddons continues to be the mode," Horace Walpole writes, "and to be modest and sensible. She declines great dinners, and says the business and cares of her family take her whole time. When Lord Carlisle carried her the tribute money from Brookes's, he said she was not *maniérée* enough. 'I suppose she was grateful?' said my niece, Lady Maria."

It is easy to imagine the difficulty she experienced in keeping her fame untarnished amidst that hot-bed of vice, Covent Garden, and amidst all the adulation lavished on her. It is impossible, indeed, to say how many enemies she made by rejecting inopportune advances, and by exciting jealousies and envy; but the worst they could ever allege was that she was hard and haughty. She was continually on her guard. "One would as soon think of making love to the Archbishop of Canterbury" was said of her later; but in the early days of her first appearance at Drury

Lane she was obliged often to have recourse to an outspoken rebuff to aspirants to her favour.

As a curious instance of the insidious manner in which attacks were sometimes made to win her regard, John Taylor relates that one morning, on calling on her, he found her in the act of burning some letters that had been returned to her by the executors of the individual to whom they were addressed. He sat down to help her, and, in doing so, a printed copy of some scandalous verses on her that had appeared in the *St. James's Gazette* dropped out. Some lines in the handwriting of the deceased poet that were written on the top of the page proved the author, and proved that attacker and defender had been one and the same person. In talking the matter over afterwards, Mrs. Siddon recalled to mind that the same person had once endeavoured to undermine her affection for her husband by telling her tales of his infidelity.

We cannot resist giving here a letter which Mrs. Siddons received many years after her first appearance on the stage, when one might have thought her age and reputation a sufficient protection against such addresses :—

Loveliest of women! In Belvidera, Isabella, Juliet, and Calista, I have admired you until my fancy threatened to burst, and the strings of my imagination were ready to crack to pieces; but, as Mrs. Siddons, I love you to madness, and until my heart and soul are overwhelmed with fondness and desire. Say not that time has placed any difference in years between you and me. The youths of her day saw no wrinkles upon the brow of Ninon de l'Enclos. It is for vulgar souls alone to grow old; but you shall flourish in eternal youth, amidst the war of elements, and the crash of worlds.

May 2nd, Barley Mow,
Salisbury Square.

So pertinacious became the persecutions of this young Irishman, for he was an Irishman, that she was

obliged to seek the protection of the law. His bursting imagination was kept in check for some little time by the sobering effects of a term of imprisonment.

Sometimes, also, her would-be adorers boasted of favours never received.

"If you should meet a Mr. Seton," she wrote to Dr. Whalley, "who lived in Leicester Square, you must not be surprised to hear him talk of being very well with my sister and myself; for, since I have been here, I have heard the old fright has been giving it out in town. You will find him rather an unlikely person to be so great a favourite with women."

Amongst fashionable ladies she counted many and constant friends. The doors of Mrs. Montagu's house (centre of intellect and fashion) were always open to her; and we hear of her there on one occasion when all the "Blues" swarmed round their "Queen Bee," and she wore her celebrated dress embroidered with the "ruins of Palmyra."

Mrs. Damer (Anne Conway), daughter of General Conway, the celebrated sculptress and woman of fashion, was also one of her most intimate friends, and later in life the actress spent many hours in her studio when bitten herself with the love of modelling. Campbell says that Mrs. Siddons's love of modelling in clay, began at Birmingham; and he tells a story of her going into a shop there, seeing a bust of herself, which the shopman, not knowing who she was, told her was the likeness of the greatest actress in the world. Mrs. Siddons bought it, and, thinking she could make a better replica of her own features, set to work and made modelling a favourite pursuit. Whether the impetus was thus given we hardly know, but it was

the fashion of the time. Mrs. Damer, who was declared by her admirers "to be as great a sculptor as Mr. Nollekens," and many other dainty fine ladies, put on mob caps and canvas aprons, wielding mallet and chisel, and kneading wax and clay with their small white hands. Mrs. Siddons was often the guest of Mrs. Damer at Strawberry Hill.

In her circle of women friends, we must not forget, either, the beautiful, fascinating, stuttering Mrs. Inchbald, the dear muse of her and her brother John. It is said that, coming off the stage one evening, she was about to sit down by Mrs. Siddons in the green-room, when, suddenly looking at her magnificent neighbour, she said, "No, I won't s-s-s-sit by you; you 're t-t-t-too handsome!" in which respect she certainly need have feared no competition, and less with Mrs. Siddons than anyone, their style of beauty being so absolutely dissimilar.

Miss Seward was one of the adorers of her circle, but, in spite of the pages of rhapsodies on the subject "of the most glorious of her sex," written to "her dear Lichfieldians" and the odes poured out to "Isabella" and "Euphrasia," it is a significant fact that we do not find one letter personally to Mrs. Siddons, nor one from Mrs. Siddons addressed to her. Practical and sincere herself, the great actress disliked "gush" of all sorts. Miss Seward wrote, "My dear friends, I arrived here at five. Think of my mortification! Mrs. Siddons in Belvidera to-night, as is supposed, for the last time before she lies in. I asked Mrs. Barrow if it would be impossible to get into the pit. "O heaven!" said she, "impossible in any part of the house!" Mrs. B—— is, I find, in the *petit souper* circle; so the dear plays oratorios, and will be

a little too much for my wishes, out of question. Adieu! Adieu!"

The Lichfieldian incense was a little too pungent for the nostrils to which it was offered. The great actress wrote, rather wearedly to her friend Dr. Whalley:—

"Believe me, my dear Sir, it is not want of inclination, but opportunity, that prevents my more frequent acknowledgments: but need I tell you this? No; you generously judge of my heart by your own. I fear I must have appeared very insensible, and, therefore, unworthy the honour Miss Seward has done me; but the perpetual round of business in which I am engaged is incredible. Shall I trespass on your goodness to say that I feel as I ought on that occasion?"

She then alludes to the kindness of the King and Queen which, sometimes to an inconvenient extent, was shown towards her all her life.

"I believe I told you that the Queen had graciously put my son down on her list for the Charterhouse; and she has done me the honour to stamp my reputation by her honoured approbation. They have seen me in all my characters but Isabella, which they have commanded for Monday next; but, having seen me in Jane Shore last night, and, judging very humanely that too quick repetitions of such exertions may injure my health, the King himself most graciously sent to the managers, and said he must deny himself the pleasure of seeing Isabella till Tuesday. This is the second time he has distinguished me in this manner. You see a vast deal of me in the papers, of my appointment at Court, and the like. All groundless; but I have the pleasure to inform you that my success has

exceeded even my hopes. My sister is engaged, and is successful. God be praised for all His mercies! You will think me an egotist, I fear. I shall certainly be at Bath in the Passion Week, if I am alive. I count the hours till then."

Our readers may like to know that when their Majesties, with the Prince of Wales, the Princess Royal, and the Princess Augusta went in state, on October 8th, 1783, to see Mrs. Siddons play Isabella, the Sovereign and his wife sat under a dome covered with crimson velvet and gold; the heir to the throne sat under another of blue velvet and silver; and the young Princesses under a third of blue satin and silver fringe. George III. wore "a plain suit of Quaker-coloured clothes, with gold buttons; the Queen, a white satin robe, with a head-dress which was ornamented by a great number of diamonds; the Princess Royal was dressed in a white and blue figured silk, and Princess Augusta in a rose-coloured and white silk of the same pattern as her sister's, having both their head-dresses richly ornamented with diamonds. His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales had a suit of dark blue Geneva velvet, richly trimmed with gold lace."

We are further told that on this occasion Mrs. Siddons was much indisposed previous to her going on the stage; and, after the curtain dropped at the end of the fifth act, was so very ill as not to be capable of walking to her dressing-room without support. Notwithstanding her suffering, she went through the part as if inspired. The Queen was so affected at her performance, that His Majesty seemed alarmed, and often diverted her attention from situations and passages that were likely to distress her.

The following snarl was found among Horace Walpole's papers:—

For the *Morning Chronicle.* On the King commanding the Tragedy of *The Grecian Daughter* on Thursday the 2nd inst. Jan. 10th, 1783.

EPIGRAMMATIC

Siddons to see—King, Lords, and Commons run,
Glad to forget that Britain is undone.
The Jesuit Shelburne, the apostate Fox,
And Bulls and Bears, together in a Box.
Thurlow neglects his promises to friends;
And scribbling Townsend no more letters sends
Cits leave their feasts, and sots desert their wine;
Each youth cries "Charming!" and each maid, "Divine!"
See, of false tears, a copious torrent flows,
But not one real, for their country's woes.
The club of spendthrifts, the rapacious bar
Of words, not arms, support the bloodless war.
Let Spain Gibraltar get, our islands France,
So Siddons acts, or Vestris leads the dance.
Run on, mad nation! pleasure's frantic round;
For acting, fiddling, dancing be renown'd!
Soon foreign fleets shall rule the Western main;
George fill no throne but that of Drury Lane.

Merlin.

George III. admired her, he said, "for her repose," adding, "Garrick could never stand still; he was a great fidget." The Queen told her, in broken English, that the only resource was to turn away from the stage; the acting was, indeed, too "disagreeable." She was frequently summoned to read at the Palace, and to give lessons in elocution to the young Princesses.

In Mrs. Siddons's memoranda, we are given an account of one of these readings. She felt extremely awkward, she tells us, in the "sack" with "hoop and treble ruffles which it was considered necessary to put on, according to court etiquette." On her arrival she was led into an ante-chamber, where there were ladies

of rank whom she knew, while presently the King appeared, drawing one of his little daughters in a "go-cart." This little princess was about three years old; and when Mrs. Siddons remarked to the lady standing next her that she longed to kiss the child, it held out its tiny hand . . . . . so early had she learnt this lesson of royalty. Mrs. Siddons was obliged to stand during the whole of a lengthened evening, preferring this to their offers of refreshment in an adjoining room, as she was terrified at the thought of retiring backwards through "the whole length of a long apartment, with highly-polished, slippery floor." Her Majesty privately expressed much astonishment at seeing her so collected, and was pleased to say that the actress had conducted herself as though she had been used to a court. "I had certainly often personated queens," was the actress's remark.

It may be mentioned as a remarkable fact that the first person outside the royal family who seems to have entertained a suspicion that insanity was creeping over the King was Mrs. Siddons. During a visit she paid to Windsor Castle at the time, the King, without any apparent motive, placed in her hands a sheet of paper bearing nothing but his signature—an incident which struck her as so unaccountable, that she immediately carried it to the Queen, who gratefully thanked her for her discretion.

But more than all the attentions of royalty, more than all the flattery lavished upon her by great people, more than all the applause and worship she received from the crowds who besieged the theatre, did she value the sparingly awarded praises and sincere shake of the shabby, noble, snuff-covered hand of "the Great Bear," before whose growl everyone trembled.

In Boswell's *Life of Johnson* he tells us the Doctor had a singular prejudice against players, "futile fellows" whom he rated no higher than rope-dancers or ballad singers. This prejudice, however, did not prevent him from hobbling off to see poor crippled Mrs. Porter when forsaken by all the rest of the world. The beginning of his liking for Mrs. Siddons is thoroughly characteristic. He always talked to his circle of lady adorers of that jade, Mrs. Siddons, until one of the "fair females" suggested that he must see the actress.

"But, indeed, Dr. Johnson," said Miss Monckton, "you *must* see Mrs. Siddons. Won't you see her in some fine part?"

"Why, if I *must*, Madam, I have no choice."

"She says, Sir, she shall be very much afraid of you."

"Madam, that cannot be true."

"Not true?" said Miss Monckton, staring. "Yes, it is."

"It *cannot* be, Madam."

"But she said so to me; I heard her say it myself."

"Madam, it is not *possible*; remember, therefore, in future, that even fiction should be supported by probability."

Miss Monckton looked all amazement, but insisted upon the truth of what she had said.

"I do not believe, Madam," said he, warmly, "that she knows my name."

"Oh, that is rating her too low," said a gentleman stranger.

"By not knowing my name," continued he, "I do not mean literally, but that when she sees it abused

in a newspaper she may possibly recollect that she has seen it abused in a newspaper before."

"Well, Sir," said Miss Monckton, "but you must see her for all this."

"Well, Madam, if you desire it, I will go; see her, I shall not, nor hear her; but I'll go, and that will do. The last time I was at a play I was ordered there by Mrs. Abington, or a Mrs. Somebody, I do not well remember who, but I placed myself in the middle of the first row of the front boxes, to show that when I was called I came."

He kept his promise, and the huge, slovenly figure, clad in a greasy brown coat and coarse black worsted stockings, was several times seen taking handfuls of snuff, and criticising the actress in his outspoken, growling fashion. She then paid him a visit in his den at Bolt Court, to which he alludes in one of his letters to Mrs. Thrale :—

"Mrs. Siddons, in her visit to me, behaved with great modesty and propriety, and left nothing behind her to be censured or despised. Neither praise nor money, the two powerful corrupters of mankind, seemed to have depraved her. I shall be glad to see her again. Her brother Kemble calls on me, and pleases me very well. Mrs. Siddons and I talked of plays, and she told me her intention of exhibiting this winter the character of Constance, Catherine, and Isabella, in Shakespeare."

Boswell gives us also the account of what took place :—

"When Mrs. Siddons came into the room, there happened to be no chair ready for her, which he observing, said with a smile : 'Madam, you who so often occasion a want of seats to other people

will the more easily excuse the want of one yourself.'

"Having placed himself by her, he with great good humour entered upon a consideration of the English drama; and, among other enquiries, particularly asked her which of Shakespeare's characters she was most pleased with. Upon her answering that she thought the character of Queen Catherine in *Henry VIII.* the most natural: 'I think so too, Madam,' said he; 'and whenever you perform it I will once more hobble out to the theatre myself.' Mrs. Siddons promised she would do herself the honour of acting his favourite part for him, but was unable to do so before grand old Samuel was laid to his last rest."

CHAPTER X.

1782 to 1798.

Mrs. Siddons's life between the years 1785 to 1798 was passed in the professional treadmill, and her history during this period is best told by an account of the characters she personated.

After her appearance as Lady Macbeth on February 2nd, she chose to act Desdemona to her brother's Othello, and, to everyone's surprise, acted it with a tenderness, playfulness, and simplicity hardly to be expected of the majestic actress, who had terrified her audience by her representation of the Thane of Cawdor's wife. Campbell tells us that even years after, when he saw her play this part at Edinburgh, not recognising at first who was acting, he was spellbound by her "exquisite gracefulness," and thought it impossible "this soft, sweet creature could be the Siddons," until by the emotion and applause of the audience he knew it could be no other.

Unfortunately, in her first representation of this part, she was carelessly given a damp bed to lie on in the death scene, and caught so severe a cold as almost to threaten rheumatic fever. From this time her deli-

cacy seems to date, for we now find her continually complaining and incapacitated from appearing by ill-health.

After Desdemona she appeared in Rosalind, which we can dismiss with the criticism of Young, the actor: "Her Rosalind wanted neither playfulness nor feminine softness, but it was totally without archness—not because she did not properly conceive it; but how could such a countenance be arch?" Her dress, too, excited great amusement—"mysterious nondescript garments." We have a letter of hers to Hamilton the artist, asking "if he would be so good as to make her a slight sketch for a boy's dress to conceal the person as much as possible." The woman who was capable of taking this view of the representation of Rosalind was not capable of acting the part.

Imogen, Ophelia, Catherine in the *Taming of the Shrew*, and Cordelia, all acted with her brother, followed in quick succession. This hard work entitled her to a salary of twenty-four pounds ten shillings weekly, while her brother drew ten pounds. Not contented with this, however, she made a tour in the provinces, Liverpool, Manchester, Birmingham, &c. These country tours were not only fatiguing in consequence of the amount of travelling to be done, but also in consequence of the unsympathetic audiences to be faced, and the discomfort of country theatres. The system, also, of absorbing all the profits of provincial actors made her very unpopular in the profession. Some ridiculous stories are related of these tours.

When playing the "sleeping scene" in *Macbeth*, at Leeds, a boy who had been sent for some porter appeared by mistake on the stage, and walking up, presented it to her. In vain she motioned him away,

in vain he was called off behind the scenes; the house roared with laughter, and all illusion was dispelled for the rest of the evening. On another occasion at Leeds, when about to drink poison on the stage, one of the audience in the gallery howled out "Soop it oop, lass!" She endeavoured to frown down the interrupter, but her own solemnity gave way. She was also at country theatres often subjected to bearing the brunt of a local quarrel or facetiousness directed against a member or members of the audience. Once at Liverpool the play of *Jane Shore*, which had sent London audiences into fits of sobbing and hysterics, was announced. The house was full, and Miss Mellon, from whom we have the story, says the actors behind the scenes expected a repetition of the same emotion; but the people in the gallery, seeing the principal merchants with their families present, thought this a delightful opportunity of indulging their wit respecting the "soldiering." Accordingly, they formed two bands, one on each side of the gallery, and, from the commencement of the play to the end, kept up a cross-dialogue of impertinence, about "charging guns with brown sugar and cocoanuts," and "small arms with cinnamon powder and nutmegs."

Miss Mellon was in agony for the object of her theatrical devotion. She cried, she ran about behind the wings as if she were going out of her senses. Mrs. Siddons, however, calm though deadly pale, merely said to her, with a slight tremor in her voice, "I will go through the *time* requisite for the scenes, but will not utter them."

She went on the stage; said aloud, "It is useless to act," crossed her arms, and merely murmured the speeches; and it is a fact that, on the first night one

of Mrs. Siddons's masterpieces was acted in Liverpool, she went through the entire performance in dumb show.

In December 1785 her second son, George, was born. As soon as she was able to write, she communicated the fact to her friends, the Whalleys, in one of her lively, light-hearted letters :—

"I have another son, healthy and lovely as an angel, born the 26th Dec.; so, you see, I take the earliest opportunity of relieving the anxiety which I know you and my dear Mrs. Whalley will feel till you hear of me. My sweet boy is so like a person of the Royal Family, that I'm rather afraid he'll bring me to disgrace. My sister jokingly tells me she's sure 'my lady his mother has played false with the prince,' and I must own he's more like him than anybody else. I will just hint to you that my father was at one time very like the King, which a little saves my credit. I rejoice that you are well, and have such pleasant society, but I wish to God you would return! I have no news for you, except that the prince is going to devote himself entirely to a Mrs. Fitzherbert, and the whole world is in an uproar about it. I know very little of her history more than that it is agreed on all hands that she is a very ambitious and clever woman, and that 'all good seeming by her revolt will be thought put on for villany,' for she was thought an example of propriety. I hear, too, that the Duchess of Devonshire is to take her by the hand, and to give her the first dinner when the preliminaries are settled; for it seems everything goes on with the utmost formality—provision made for children, and so on. Some people rejoice and some mourn at this event. I have not heard what his mother says to it. The Royal

Family have been nearly all ill, but are now recovering, and they graciously intend to command me to play in *The Way to Keep Him* the first night I perform. They are gracious to me beyond measure on all occasions, and take all opportunities to show the world that they are so. How good and considerate is this! They know what a sanction their countenance is, and they are amiable beyond description. Since my confinement I have received the kindest messages from them; they make me of consequence enough to desire I won't think of playing till I feel quite strong, and a thousand more kind things. I perceive a little shooting in my temples that tells me I have written enough.

"I don't take leave of you, however, without telling you that I am very much disappointed in Sherriffe's picture of me, and am afraid to employ him about your snuff-box. I don't know what to do about it, for that promised to be so well that I almost engaged him in the fulness of my heart to do it. I have not been in face these last four months; but now that I am growing as amiable as ever, I shall sit for it as soon as possible. God Almighty bless you both!

"Yours,

"S. Siddons."

Later she writes again to Whalley:—

"I have at last, my friend, attained the *ten thousand pounds* which I set my heart upon, and am now perfectly at ease with respect to fortune. I thank God who has enabled me to procure to myself so comfortable an income. I am sure my dear Mrs. Whalley and you will be pleased to hear this from myself. What a thing a balloon would be! but, the deuce take them, I do not find that they are likely to be brought

to any good. Good heaven! what delight it would be to see you for a few days only! I have a nice house, and I could contrive to make up a bed. I know you and my dear Mrs. Whalley would accept my sincere endeavours to accommodate you; but don't let me be taken by surprise, my dear friend, for were I to see you first at the theatre, I can't answer for what might be the consequence.

"I stand some knocks with tolerable firmness, I suppose from habit; but those of joy being so infinitely less frequent, I conceive must be more difficultly sustained.

"You will find I have been a niggard of my praise, when you see your Fanny. Oh! my beloved friend, you could not speak to one who understands those anxieties you mention better than I do. Surely it is needless to say no one more ardently prays that God Almighty, in His mercy, will avert the calamity; and surely, surely there is everything to hope for from such dispositions, improved by such an education. My family is well, God be praised! My two sisters are married and happy. Mrs. Twiss will present us with a new relation towards February. At Christmas I bring my dear girls from Miss Eames, or rather she brings them to me. Eliza is the most entertaining creature in the world; Sally is vastly clever; Maria and George are beautiful; and Harry, a boy with very good parts, but not disposed to learning."

In spite of her statement that once she had made ten thousand pounds she would rest contented, we find her for the two next years working without intermission, going from York to Edinburgh, from Edinburgh to Liverpool. In 1788 Kemble succeeded King as manager of Drury Lane, and his sister returned to

assist, first of all in his spectacular revival of *Macbeth*, in which, among other innovations, he brought in the black, grey, and white spirits, as bands of little boys. One of these imps was insubordinate, and was sent away in disgrace; his name was "Edmund Kean."

They then acted *Henry VIII.* together, Kemble contenting himself with "doubling" the characters of Cromwell and Griffith, Bensley having already possession of the part of Wolsey. The representation was a success in every way, and Mrs. Siddons's Queen Katherine was henceforth ranked as equal to her Lady Macbeth.

On the 7th February following she played for the first time Volumnia to her brother's Coriolanus. An eye-witness tells us:—

"I remember her coming down the stage in the triumphal entry of her son Coriolanus, when her dumb show drew plaudits that shook the building. She came alone, marching and beating time to the music; rolling (if that be not too strong a term to describe her motion) from side to side, swelling with the triumph of her son. Such was the intoxication of joy which flashed from her eye, and lit up her whole face, that the effect was irresistible. She seemed to me to reap all the glory of that procession to herself. I could not take my eye from her. Coriolanus, banner, and pageant, all went for nothing to me, after she had walked to her place."

Many are the testimonies of actors and actresses that show her extraordinary personal power. Young relates that he was once acting Beverley with her at Edinburgh. They had reached the fifth act, when Beverley had swallowed the poison, and Bates comes in, and says to the dying man, "Jarvis found you quarrelling

with Jewson in the streets last night." Mrs. Beverley says, "No, I am sure he did not!" to which Jarvis replies, "Or if I did?" meaning, it may be supposed, to add, "The fault was not with my master." But the moment he utters the words "Or if I did?" Mrs. Beverley exclaims, "'Tis false, old man! They had no quarrel—there was no cause for quarrel!" In uttering this, Mrs. Siddons caught hold of Jarvis, and gave the exclamation with such piercing grief, that Young said his throat swelled and his utterance was choked. He stood unable to repeat the words which, as Beverley, he ought to have immediately delivered. The prompter repeated the speech several times, till Mrs. Siddons, coming up to her fellow-actor, put the tips of her fingers on his shoulders, and said in a low voice, "Mr. Young, recollect yourself."

Macready relates an equally remarkable instance of her power. In the last act of Rowe's *Tamerlane*, when, by the order of the tyrant Moneses, Aspasia's lover is strangled before her face, she worked herself up to such a pitch of agony that, as she sank a lifeless heap before the murderer, the audience remained for several moments awe-struck, then clamoured for the curtain to fall, believing that she was really dead; and only the earnest assurances of the manager to the contrary could satisfy them. Holman and the elder Macready were among the spectators, and looked aghast at one another. "Macready, do I look as pale as you?" inquired the former.

On another occasion, when performing *Henry VIII.* with a raw "supernumerary" who was playing Surveyor, when she warned him against giving false testimony against his master, her look was so terrific that the unfortunate youth came off perspiring with

terror, and swearing that nothing would induce him to meet that woman's eyes again.

Had Mrs. Siddons lived in our day, every shop-window would have been crowded with photographs of her classically beautiful face, in every pose and every costume. Mercifully she lived in the days of Gainsborough and Reynolds, and is, therefore, the original of two of the most beautiful female portraits ever painted. Sir Joshua is said to have borrowed his conception from a figure designed by Michael Angelo on the roof of the Sixtine Chapel. She is seated in a chair of state, with two figures behind holding the dagger and the bowl. The head is thrown back in an attitude of dramatic inspiration, the right hand thrown over an arm of the seat, the left raised, pointing upwards. A tiara, necklace, and splendid folds of drapery enhance the stateliness of the composition. It is, undoubtedly, the great painter's masterpiece. "The picture," Northcote says, "kept him in a fever." The unfavourable reception his pictures of the year before had met with made him resolved to show the critics that he was not past his prime, while the grandeur and magnificence of the sitter stimulated him to the exertion of all his genius.

Mrs. Siddons was fond, in later years, of describing her sittings. "Ascend your undisputed throne," said the painter, leading her to the platform. "Bestow on me some idea of the tragic muse." And then, when it was ended, the great painter insisted on inscribing his name on her robe, saying that he could not lose the honour of going down to posterity on the hem of her garment. We, who only know of her greatness from hearsay, can form some idea of what she must have been from this magnificent conception.

Very nearly as noble and beautiful is the portrait by Gainsborough. The delicacy of a refined English complexion has never been so beautifully painted, while the tone and colour is as exquisite as anything Gainsborough ever did. The light transparent blue, cool yellow, crimson, brown, and black, forms an enchanting setting for the lovely head, which stands out clear and delicate. It is said, that while Gainsborough was painting her, after working in an absorbed silence for some time, he suddenly exclaimed, "Damn it, Madam, there is no end to your nose!" And, indeed, it does stand out a little sharply. But the great feature of the Kembles was the jaw-bone. The actress herself exclaimed, laughing, "The Kemble jaw-bone! Why, it is as notorious as Samson's!" Mrs. Jameson declares that she saw Mrs. Siddons sitting near Gainsborough's portrait two years before her death, and, looking from one to the other, she says, "It was like her still, at the age of seventy."

Years after, Fanny Kemble, her grand-daughter, while walking through the streets of Baltimore, saw an engraving of Reynolds's "Tragic Muse" and Lawrence's picture of John Kemble's "Hamlet." "We stopped," she says, "before them, and my father looked with a great deal of emotion at these beautiful representations of his beautiful kindred. It was a sort of sad surprise to meet them in this other world, where we are wandering aliens and strangers."

From the numerous portraits extant of Mrs. Siddons we can form an idea of her appearance, of which such legendary accounts have been handed down. She was much above middle height; as a girl she was exceedingly thin and spare, and this remained her characteristic until she was about twenty-two or three.

"Sarah Kemble would be a fine-looking woman one of these days," a friend of her father remarked, "provided she could but add flesh to her bones, and provided her eyes were as small again."

This is, in fact, what did occur. Her increasing plumpness rounded off all angles, making the eyes less prominent; and at the age of twenty-four or twenty-five she was in the very prime of her marvellous beauty. She had a singular energy and elasticity of motion. Her head was beautifully set on her shoulders. Her features were fine and expressive, the nose a little long, but counterbalanced by the height of the brow, and firmly-modelled chin. The eye-brows were marked, and ran straight across the brow; her eyes positively flamed at times. A fixed pallor overspread her features in later days, which was seldom tinged with colour. It is difficult, looking at the stately fine lady painted by Gainsborough, to imagine the bursts of passion that convulsed her on the stage. Her voice, as years matured its power, was capable of every inflection of feeling; while her articulation was singularly clear and exact. There was no undue raising of the voice, no overdoing of action; all was moderate and quiet until passion was demanded, and then swift and sudden it burst forth.

In Kemble's manner at times there was a sacrifice of energy to grace. This observation, Braden tells us, was made by Mrs. Siddons herself, who admired her brother, in general, as much as she loved him. She illustrated her meaning by rising and placing herself in the attitude of one of the old Egyptian statues; the knees joined together, and the feet turned a little inwards. Placing her elbows close to her sides, she folded her hands, and held them upright, with the

palms pressed to each other. Having made those present observe that she had assumed one of the most constrained, and, therefore, most ungraceful positions possible, she proceeded to recite the curse of King Lear on his undutiful offspring, in a manner which made *hair rise and flesh creep,* and then called on us to remark the additional effect which was gained by the concentrated energy which the unusual and ungraceful posture in itself implied.

It is a characteristic trait, that by the Kemble family John should have been considered a finer player than Sarah. We know that he continually gave her directions and instructions, which she accepted with all humility, and followed, until she had made herself *sure* of her ground. No one, however gifted, could then shake her conscientious adherence to her own views.

The subtle difference that lies between genius and talent separated the two. Kemble repeated beautiful words suitably; Mrs. Siddons was magnificent before she spoke, thrilling her audience with a silence more significant than all else in the development of human emotion. We can see how grand she was, independently of her author, by the miserable plays she made famous; when her genius was no longer present to breathe life and passion into them they passed into oblivion.

The number of indifferent plays she was entreated to appear in were legion. All her friends seemed to think they could write plays, and that she was the one and only person who could appear in them. We find her piteously writing to a friend who had sent her a tragedy:—

"It is impossible for you to conceive how hard it is

to say that *Astarte* will not do as you and I would have it do. Thank God, it is over! It has been so bitter a sentence for me to pronounce, that it has wrung drops of sorrow from the very bottom of my heart. Let me entreat, if you have any idea that I am too tenacious of your honour, that you will suffer me to ask the opinion of others, which may be done without naming the author. I must, however, premise that what is charming in the closet often ceases to be so when it comes into consideration for the stage."

Conceited Fanny Burney must needs write a tragedy, *Edwin and Elgitha.* Her stumbling-block was "Bishops." At that time there was a popular drink called "Bishop," composed of certain intoxicating ingredients. When, therefore, in one of the earlier scenes the King gave the order "Bring in the Bishop," the audience went into roars of laughter. The dying scene seemed to have no effect in damping their mirth. A passing stranger, in a tragic tone, proposed to carry the expiring heroine to the other side of a hedge. This hedge, though remote from any dwelling, proved to be a commodious retreat, for, in a few minutes afterwards, the wounded lady was brought from behind it on an elegant couch, and, after dying in the presence of her husband, was removed once more to the back of the hedge. The effect proved too ridiculous for the audience, and Mrs. Siddons was carried off amidst renewed roars of laughter.

Dr. Whalley must then needs press a tragedy of his own upon her, *The Castle of Mowal,* which was yawned at for three nights. It is said that when the author went down to Mr. Peake, the treasurer, to know what benefit might have accrued to him, it

amounted to nothing. "I have been," said the doctor, an old picquet-player, "piqued and repiqued"; and so he retired from the scene of his discomfiture to Bath, where he plumed himself on the fact of having "run for three nights."

Her next essay in the cause of friendship was in Bertie Greatheed's tragedy of *The Regent*. She writes in reference to it:—

"The plot of the poor young man's piece, it strikes me, is very lame, and the characters very—very ill-sustained in general; but more particularly the lady, for whom the author had me in his eye. This woman is one of those monsters (I think them) of perfection, who is an angel before her time, and is so entirely resigned to the will of Heaven, that (to a very mortal like myself) she appears to be the most provoking piece of still life one ever had the misfortune to meet. Her struggles and conflicts are so weakly expressed, that we conclude they do not cost her much pain, and she is so pious that we are satisfied she looks upon her afflictions as so many convoys to Heaven, and wish her there, or anywhere else but in the tragedy. I have said all this, and ten times more, to them both, with as much delicacy as I am mistress of; but Mr. G. says that it would give him no great trouble to alter it, provided I will undertake the milksop lady. I am in a very distressed situation, for, unless he makes her a totally different character, I cannot possibly have anything to do with her."

The piece was eventually performed for twelve nights, and then consigned to oblivion; but the author was so satisfied that he gave a supper, which was followed by a drinking-bout at the "Brown Bear" in Bow Street, at which a subordinate actor named Phil-

limore was sufficiently tipsy to have courage enough to fight his lord and master, John Kemble, who was elevated enough to defend himself, and generous enough to forget the affair next morning.

Other parts were declined by her for other reasons. Colman had written an epilogue to Mr. Jephson's *Julia,* which she refused to speak because she declared it to be "coarse;" and the part of Cleopatra, she said she never would act, because "she would hate herself if she were to play it as she thought it should be played." And there she was right; the "Serpent of Old Nile" was not within her range.

One of her admirers tells us that her majestic and imposing person, and the commanding character of her beauty, militated against the effect she produced in the part of Mrs. Haller. "No man alive or dead," said he, "would have dared to take a liberty with her; wicked she might be, but weak she could not be, and when she told the story of her ill-conduct in the play nobody believed her." Another eye-witness, speaking of "the fair penitent," said that it was worth sitting out the piece for her scene with Romont alone, to see "such a splendid animal in such a magnificent rage."

And yet, what a kind heart it was to an erring sister! "Charming and beautiful Mrs. Robinson," she writes, referring to Perdita Robinson, "I pity her from the bottom of my soul." And what a generous helping hand she stretched out to her younger colleagues. When Miss Mellon, twenty years her junior, was acting with her at Liverpool, Mrs. Siddons one morning at rehearsal turned to an actor, a friend of hers, who had known her for years, and said:

"There is a young woman here whom I am sure I have seen at Drury Lane."

He told her it was Miss Mellon, who had just come out.

"She seems a nice, pretty young woman," returned the great actress, "and I pity her situation in that hotbed of iniquity, Drury Lane; it is almost impossible for a young, pretty, and unprotected female to escape. How has she conducted herself?"

The person she addressed, who relates the story, replied:

"With the greatest propriety."

"Then please present her to me."

The young lady, colouring highly and looking very handsome, came forward. The Queen of Tragedy took her by the hand, and, after a few kind encouraging words, led her forward among the company and said:

"Ladies and Gentlemen, I am told by one I know very well that this young lady has always conducted herself with the utmost propriety. I, therefore, introduce her as my young friend."

This electrified the parties in the green-room, who had not looked for such a flattering distinction for the young actress; but, of course, they were all too glad to follow Mrs. Siddons in anything, and Miss Mellon was overwhelmed with attention. Afterwards, on the return of Mrs. Siddons and Miss Mellon to their duties in London for the succeeding season, the former repeated the compliment she had paid her at Liverpool, making the same statement regarding her excellent conduct; and by thus bringing her forward under such advantageous circumstances, procured her admission to the first green-room, where her inferior salary did not entitle her to be, except on such a recommendation as that of Mrs. Siddons.

In the summer of 1790, being in delicate health,

and disgusted at Sheridan's treatment of her, she went with her husband to France, accompanied by Miss Wynn. They first stopped at Calais, where their daughters, Sarah and Maria, were at a boarding-school, and then went on to Lisle. The letter she wrote to Lady Harcourt on her return is so characteristic in its energetic, outspoken sincerity, that it seems unjust not to quote every word of it :—

"Sandgate, near Folkestone, Kent.
"August 2nd.

"My dear Lady Harcourt,

"After so long a silence, your good nature will exalt itself to hear a long letter full of egotism, and I will begin with Streatham, where you may remember to have heard me talk of going with no great degree of pleasurable expectation, supposing it impossible that I should ever feel much more for Mrs. P.* than admiration of her talents; but, after having very unexpectedly stayed there more than three weeks, during which time every moment gave me fresh instances of unremitting kindness and attention to me, and, indeed, a very extraordinary degree of benevolence and forbearance towards those who have not deserved much lenity at her hands (and it is wonderful how many there are of that description), I left them with great regret; and between their very great kindness, their wit, and their music, they made me love, esteem, and admire them very much. In a few days I set out with Mr. S., Miss Wynn, and her brother, for Calais, and, after a very rough passage, arrived at Calais, and found my dear girls quite well

* Mrs. Piozzi, who, after Mr. Thrale's death, had married again, much to the disgust of the Johnsonian band.

and improved in their persons, and (I am told) in their French. I was very much struck with the difference of objects and customs when I reflected how small a space divides one nation from the other, like true English. We saw all we could, and I thought *of* my dear Lord Harcourt, though not *with* him, in their churches. I own (though I blame myself at the same time for it) I was disgusted with all the pomp and magnificence of them, when I saw the priests 'playing such fantastic tricks before high Heaven as (I think) must make the angels weep'; and the people gabbling over their prayers, even in the *act of gaping,* to have it over as quick as might be. Alas! said I to myself, in the pitifulness, and perhaps vanity, of my heart, how sorry I am for these poor deluded people, and how much more worthy the Deity ('who does prefer before all temples the upright heart and pure') are the sublime and simple forms of *our* religion. Indeed, my dear Madam, I am better satisfied with the ideas and feelings that have been excited in my heart in *your* garden at *Nuneham,* than ever I have been in those fine gewgaw places, and believe Mr. Haggitt, by his plain and sensible sermons, has done more good than a legion of these priests would do if they were to live to the age of Methusalem. I am willing to own that all this may be prejudice, and that *we* may not *mean* better than our *neighbours*; but *fire* shall not burn my opinion out of me, and so *God mend all.* Now, to turn to our *great selves.* We took our little folks to Lisle; it is a very fine town, and, though I know nothing of the language, the acting was so really good that it gave me very great pleasure. The language of true genius, like that of Nature, is intelligible to all. We stayed there a few days, and

you would have laughed to have seen my amazement at the valet of the inn assisting the *femme de chambre* in the making of our beds. The *beds* are the best I ever slept upon; but the valet's kind offices I could always, I think, dispense with, good heavens! Well, we returned to Calais, where I would have stayed a few months, and have employed myself in acquiring a few French phrases with the dear children, if Mrs. Temple would have taken me in; but she said she had not room to accommodate me, and I unwillingly gave up the point. In a day or two we set sail, after seeing the civic oath administered on the fourteenth. It was a fine thing even at Calais. I was extremely delighted and affected, not, indeed, at the *sensible objects*, though a great multitude is often a grand thing, but the idea of so many millions throughout that great nation, with one consent, at one moment (as it were by Divine Inspiration), breaking their bonds asunder, filled one with sympathetic exultation, good-will, and tenderness. I rejoiced with them from my heart, and most sincerely hope they will not abuse the glorious freedom they have obtained. We were nearly twenty hours on the sea on our return, and arrived at Dover fatigued and sick to death. Dr. Wynn was obliged to make the best of his way to London on account of a sermon he was engaged to preach, and took his charming sister with him. *We* made haste here, and it is the most agreeable sea-place, excepting those on the Devonshire coast, I ever saw. Perhaps *agreeable* is a bad word, for the country is much more sublime than beautiful. We have tremendous cliffs overhanging and frowning on the foaming sea, which is very often so saucy and tempestuous as to *deserve* frowning on; from whence, when the weather is clear, we see the land of France,

and the vessels cross from the Downs to Calais. Sometimes, while you *stand* there, it is amazing with what velocity they skim along. Here are little neat lodgings, and good wholesome provisions. Perhaps they would not suit a great *countess*, as our friend Mr. Mason has it, but a little great actress is more easily accommodated. I 'm afraid it will grow larger, though, and then adieu to the comforts of retirement. At present the place cannot contain above twenty or thirty strangers, I should think. I have bathed four times, and believe I shall persevere, for Sir Lucas Pepys says my disease is entirely nervous. I believe I am better, but I get on so slowly that I cannot speak as yet with much certainty. I still suffer a good deal. Mr. Siddons leaves me here for a fortnight while he goes to town upon business, and my spirits are so bad that I live in terror of being left alone so long. We have been here nearly three weeks, and I propose staying here, if possible, till September, when I shall go to town to my brother's for some days, and then set off for Mr. Whalley's at Bath. I shall hope to see you at Nuneham, though, before you leave it.

"Now, my dear Lady Harcourt, let me congratulate you upon having almost got to the end of this interesting epistle and *myself*, in the honour of your friendship, which has flattered me into the comfort of believing that you will not be tired of your prosing, but always very affectionate and faithful servant,

"S. Siddons.

"Pray offer my love, and our united compliments, to all."

Michael Kelly gives an account of the landlady's opinion of *La grande actrice Anglaise* at the hotel

at St. Omer, where he stopped shortly after Mrs. Siddons had been there. She considered her handsome, declared she was trying to imitate French women, but fell very far short of them.

She was induced to return to Drury Lane about the end of 1790, and in April we find Horace Walpole writing to tell Miss Berry that he had supped with Kemble and Mrs. Siddons "t'other night at Miss Farren's, at the bow-window house in Green Street, Grosvenor Square." He pronounces the actress to be "leaner." We can see the party: cynical, sneering Walpole; beautiful Miss Farren, afterwards Countess of Derby, the hostess; Mrs. Siddons, "august" and matronly; and solemn John, who had just made a hit as Othello.

It was the last year of old Drury's existence, and, for her brother's sake, she bore her part bravely, acting when called upon; but she soon flagged, and could only act a few nights. Her reappearance was welcomed with wild enthusiasm; she seemed as popular as ever. One night over four hundred pounds was paid by the public to see her in Mrs. Beverley.

About 1792 or 3 she seems to have taken a house at Nuneham, near the Harcourts—the Rectory, we presume, for we find her writing to Lord Harcourt, devising little comforts for their summer residence at Nuneham, thanking him for his "neighbourly" attention; and one or two letters she writes to John Taylor are dated Nuneham Rectory. One is on the subject of a Life of herself which he wished to undertake; the other refers to her modelling, and an accident which happened to her husband and children.

"I am in no danger of being too much occupied by my 'favorite clay,' for it is not arriv'd — how pro-

voking and vexatious! particularly as I am dying to attempt a Bust of my sweet little George, and his Holidays will be over, I fear, before I am able to finish it. Apropos to George, the dear little Soul has escapd being dangerously hurt, if not kill'd (my blood runs cold at the thought), by almost a miracle. Mr. Siddons and Maria have not been so fortunate, they are both cripples at present with each a wounded Leg, but I hope they are in a fair way to get better. The accident (so these things are called, but not by *me*; I know you 'll deride my *Superstition,* but this kind of Superstition has not unfrequently afforded me great aid and consolation, and I hate to discard an old friend because she happens to be a little out of Fashion, so Laugh on, I dont care) happen'd from their being forcd to jump out of a little Market Cart which Mr. Siddons had orderd to indulge the children in a drive. Thank God I did not see it and that they have escapd so well!!! This is the Sweetest Situation in England, I believe. I wish you would come and see it. If I had a Bed to offer you I should be more pressing, but I could get you one at the Inn in the Village, if you should be disposd to go to those fine doings at Oxford, where all the world will be, except such Stupid Souls as myself. Mr. Combe is at Lord Harcourt's; I understand he is writing a History of the Thames, and his Lordships House is the present Seat of his observations. I have not the pleasure to know him, but am to Dine with him at Lord H——'s to-morrow. [This is the Combe of Wolverhampton memory, whom Mrs. Kemble had refused as instructor for her daughter. The stately "I have not the pleasure to know him" is so like Mrs. Siddons.] Give my kind love to Betsey when you See her, and I earnestly entreat you (if it be

not too much vanity to Suppose you w^d *wish* to preserve them a moment beyond reading them) that you will burn all my Letters; tell me Seriously you will do so! for there is nothing I dread like having all one's nonsense appear in print by some untoward accident —not accident neither, but wicked or *interested design,* pray do me the fav^r to ask at our House why my precious Clay has not been Sent, and tell me Something about it when you write again. Adieu."

CHAPTER XI.

SHERIDAN.

The apparition of Sheridan, meteor-like, in the laborious, active, well-regulated lives of Mrs. Siddons and her brother, and the history of his professional intercourse with them, is one of the greatest proofs of the extraordinary glamour exercised by the specious Irishman on all who came under his personal influence. After Garrick's retirement from the management of Drury Lane, the overwhelming success of the *School for Scandal*, and the engagement of Mrs. Siddons, staved off financial difficulties for a time; but no amount of receipts were sufficient to withstand Sheridan's reckless private expenditure and unbusiness-like habits. The brilliant Brinsley did not recognise that other qualities besides the power to write a good play, or make a great speech, were necessary for the management of such a concern as Garrick's Drury Lane. The truth, however, was borne home to him by the utter chaos that ultimately ensued: actors unpaid, and the treasury repeatedly emptied by the proprietor himself before the money had been diverted into its legitimate channels. Yet the receipts at the doors amounted to nearly sixty thousand

pounds a year. Things would have gone better could he have been persuaded entirely to abstain from management, but he persistently interfered with his subordinates. When a dramatist was employed in reading his tragedy to the performers, Brinsley would saunter in, yawning, at the fifth act, with no other apology than, having sat up late two nights running, he was unable to appear in time; or he would arrive drunk, go into the green-room, ask the name of a well-known actor who was on the stage, and bid them never to allow him to play again. He was once told, with some spirit, by one of the company, that he rarely came there, and then never but to find fault.

Things grew worse and worse. It was piteous to hear the complaints of the actors and staff of the theatre, who found it impossible to obtain payment of their weekly salaries. The shifts and devices which he employed to escape from their importunity was a constant subject of jest.

At last he was obliged to let the reins of management fall from his incapable hands. They were taken up by King; but he in turn soon found the position intolerable, and the stern and businesslike Kemble was called in to restore discipline among unruly players whose salaries were overdue, and amongst upholsterers and decorators who had never been paid for the pieces they had mounted.

It required the courage and determination of a Kemble to undertake the clearing out of such an Augean stable. "The public approbation of my humble endeavours in the discharge of my duties will be the constant object of my ambition," he said, in his modest declaration on the acceptance of the appointment; "and as far as diligence and assiduity

are claims to merit, I trust I shall not be found deficient." Nor was he found deficient. Bringing extraordinary determination to the task, he soon got the theatre into order, with an efficient working company, of which he and his sister, Mrs. Siddons, were the ruling spirits.

Sheridan had not even the good sense in this critical juncture in his affairs to propitiate the great actress on whom the fortunes of the house rested. There is something comic, indeed, in his relations with the Tragedy Queen. They rather remind us of an incorrigible schoolboy continually offending those in authority, and yet confident in their affection and his own powers of persuasion to obtain indulgence and forgiveness.

Once Mrs. Siddons had declared that she would not act until her salary was paid, she resisted inflexibly the earnest appeals of her colleagues and the commands of the manager, and was quietly sewing at home after the curtain had risen for the piece in which she was expected to perform. Sheridan appeared, like the magician in a pantomime, courteous, irresistible; she yielded helplessly, "and suffered herself to be driven to the theatre like a lamb."

One night, Mr. Rogers tells us, having heard the story from her own lips, when she was about to drive away from the theatre, Mr. Sheridan jumped into the carriage. "Mr. Sheridan," said the dignified Muse of Tragedy, "*I trust that you will behave with propriety;* if not, I shall have to call the footman to show you out of the carriage." She owned that he *did* behave himself. But as soon as the carriage stopped, he leaped out, and hurried away, as though wishing not to be seen with her. "Provoking wretch!" she said,

with an indulgent smile, which even she, encased in all her panoply of prudish decorum, could not suppress.

At last even her patience was worn out, and at the close of her brother's first year of management she retired from the theatre. Sheridan dared to boast they could do without her. A scheme was then hatching in the ever-fertile Irish brain of the proprietor that was destined to revolutionise the dramatic world of London. He discovered that the taste of the day, and the requirements of his own pocket, demanded a larger and more luxurious building than Old Drury; the walls that had re-echoed to the grand tones of Betterton, the musical love-making of Barry, and the passionate declamation of Garrick, was to be pulled down to satisfy the greed and the ambition of Sheridan. Immediate proposals for debentures amounting to £160,000 were issued, and, wonderful to relate, taken up in a very short time. But, alas! to cover the interest of this enormous sum, it was determined to build a house nearly double the size. Neither Mrs. Siddons nor her brother seems to have considered the disastrous consequence this would exercise on their art. The perfect acoustics and compact stage of the old house were to be swept away to give place to an immense dome-shaped space, and an expanse requiring undignified energy of motion to traverse. The immediate consequence was evident; recourse had to be taken to stage artifice to manage the entrance and the exit, while gesture had to be more violent, expression more exaggerated, and voice unduly raised to produce an effect.

In Garrick's Drury, also, the front row of boxes was open like a gallery, and everyone who occupied them

was obliged to appear in full dress. The row of boxes above these again were given up to the *bourgeoisie*, while the lattices at the top were the portion destined to those whose reputation was doubtful, and who by their unseemly behaviour might disturb the decorum of the audience. Garrick was master of his art, and knew how to value the criticism and sympathy of the crowd. Under his management the two-shilling gallery was brought down to a level with the second row of boxes. By that arrangement a player had the mass of the audience under his immediate control; and that mass, uninfluenced by fashion or prejudice, unerring in its judgment, is the dread of an inferior actor, the delight of a great one.

While the theatre was still in process of erection, the company performed at the Opera House in the Haymarket, or, as it was called, the King's Theatre. The new house was opened on April 21st, 1794, with *Macbeth*.

"I am told," Mrs. Siddons writes to Lady Harcourt, "that the banquet is a thing to go and see of itself. The scenes and dresses all new, and as superb and characteristic as it is possible to make them. You cannot conceive what I feel at the prospect of playing there. I daresay I shall be so nervous as scarcely to be able to make myself heard in the first scene."

This banquetting scene in *Macbeth* was made the subject of sarcastic hints in the daily press on the old score of her avarice:—

"The soul of Mrs. Siddons (Mrs. Siddons whose dinners and suppers are proverbially numerous) expanded on this occasion. She speaks her joy on seeing so many guests with an earnestness little short of rapture. Her address appeared so like reality,

that all her hearers about her seized the wooden fowls" . . . .

The great actress soon felt a great mistake had been made. "I am glad to see you at Drury Lane," she said to a colleague, "but you are come to act in a wilderness of a place, and, God knows, if I had not made my reputation in a small theatre, I never should have done it."

It was indeed "a wilderness of a place." The mere opening for the curtain was forty-three feet wide, and thirty-eight feet high, or nearly seven times the height of the performers. Miss Mellon laughingly said she "felt a mere shrimp" when acting in it The result might be foreseen. Had not the great actress indeed made her reputation on a small theatre, never would she have made it here. We, who only know of Mrs. Siddons by immediate tradition, are inclined to think that she ranted, and destroyed her effects by exaggeration of gesture and expression. There is little doubt we are justified in so thinking, and that the increased size of the theatre and audience were to blame.

What a world of significance lies also in her words: "The banquet is a thing to go and see of itself." A new era had begun; the stage, and everything belonging to it, ought to be taken out of the domain of everyday life, and, by appealing to the intellectual comprehension of the audience, raise them to an understanding of the grandeur of conception and passion of a Shakespeare. Garrick acted Othello in a cocked hat and scarlet uniform, and yet impressed his audience with a pathetic and intense reality. Mrs. Siddons acted Lady Macbeth in black velvet and point lace, and yet imparted a majesty and grace to the imper-

sonation never before seen on the English stage. Now we see the Mephistopheles, Sheridan, inducing her to barter away her reputation and ideal of great art for the substantial benefits of increased gains and larger audiences.

A different class of entertainment now invaded the classic boards. We can see *Timour the Tartar*, *Tekeli, or the Siege of Montgatz*, *The Miller and His Men*, *Pizarro*, and a host of spectacular pieces, mounted to draw numerous and uncritical audiences. This first season was a fatiguing and anxious one for the great actress, more especially also that she was in delicate health. Her daughter Cecilia was born this year, 1794, on 25th July. Her husband wrote to a friend :—

I have the pleasure to tell you your little god-daughter (for such she is, myself being your proxy a few days back) is very well, and as fine a girl as if her father was not more than one-and-twenty. She is named after Mrs. Piozzi's youngest daughter, Cecilia ; her sponsors are yourself and Mr. Greatheed, Mrs. Piozzi and Lady Percival (*ci devant* Miss B. Wynn) ; and, what is better, the mother is well, too, and is just going to the theatre to perform Mrs. Beverley for the benefit of her brother's wife, Mrs. Stephen Kemble.

She never all through life gave herself the rest requisite to re-establish her health ; always before the public, what wonder that languor and weakness attacked her physically, and despondency and dissatisfaction mentally.

"My whole family are gone to Margate," she wrote in September, "whither I am going also, and nothing would make it tolerable to me, but that my husband and daughters are delighted with the prospect before them. I wish they could go and enjoy themselves there, and leave me the comfort and pleasure of remaining in my own convenient house, and taking care of my baby. But I am every day more and more

convinced that half the world live for themselves, and the other half for the comfort of the former. At least this I am sure of, that I have had no will of my own since I remember; and, indeed, to be just, I fancy I should have little delight in such an existence."

She told her friend Mr. Whalley, on the eve of setting out for Edinburgh to play at her son Henry's theatre :—"I intend, if it please God, to be at home again for Passion week. I leave my sweet girl behind me, not daring to take her so far north this inclement season, and could well wish that the interests of the best of sons, and most amiable of men, did not so imperiously call me out of this softer climate just now. But I shall pack myself up as warmly as I can, trusting that while I run a little risk, I shall do a great deal of good to my dear Harry, who tells me all my friends are more eager to see me than ever. It is not impossible that I may stop a night or two here before I go, which, as I have long been engaged to act this season after Easter, and cannot in honour or honesty be off, I think will not be impolitic, lest my enemies, if their malignity be worth a thought, may think their impotent attempts have frightened me away. They have done all their malignant treachery could devise, and have they robbed me of one friend? No, God be praised! But, on the contrary, have knit them all closer to me. Glad enough should I be never to appear again, but, while the interests of those so dear and near as those of son and brother are concerned, one must not let selfish consideration stand in the way of Christian duties and natural affection."

The public are inclined to think that the life of an artist spent continually before the footlights is one eminently conducive to hardening the sensibilities

against calumny; but it is a curious fact that actors are like children in their craving for applause and praise, and in their fear of criticism and blame. Garrick wrote a year before his death to the scoundrel who persecuted him, "Will Curtius take the word of the accused for his innocence?" and Mrs. Siddons, through her husband, offered one thousand pounds for the libeller to whom she refers in the following letter:—

"One would think I had already furnished conjectures and lies sufficient for public gossip; but now the people here begin again with me. They say that I am mad, and that *that* is the reason of my confinement. I should laugh at this rumour were it not for the sake of my children, to whom it may not be very advantageous to be supposed to inherit so dreadful a malady; and this consideration, I am almost ashamed to own, has made me seriously unhappy. However, I really believe I am in my sober senses, and most heartily do I now wish myself with you at dear Streatham, where I could, as usual, forget all the pains and torments of illness and the world. But I fear I have now no chance for such happiness."

"Kotzebue and German sausages are the order of the day," Sheridan said when he brought out the English adaptation of *The Stranger*. Mrs. Haller, in Mrs. Siddons's hands, became pathetic, almost grand; but to us now-a-days, uninfluenced by the glamour of her presence, the sickly sentiment and impossible situations of the play make it an untempting meal for our practical and realistic mental digestions.

Its success was so great as to induce the author of the *School for Scandal*—who had lost all power of original conception, yet was obliged to fill his pockets

—to adapt another play, *Pizarro,* also by Kotzebue. Did we not know the history of the celebrated first night of his play, on unimpeachable evidence, we should be inclined to look upon it as one of those exaggerated tales that, related by one of the many gossips of the time, had grown out of all possibility of credence. Sheridan was up-stairs in the prompter's room, stimulating his jaded brain by sips of port, and writing out the last act of the play, while the earlier parts were acting; every ten minutes he brought down as much of the dialogue as he had done piecemeal into the green-room, abusing himself and his negligence, and making a thousand winning and soothing apologies for having kept the performers so long in such painful suspense. What, under these circumstances, became of the thorough and elaborate study declared by the Kembles to be necessary for the perfection of the dramatic art, we know not. Rolla and Mrs. Siddons's Elvira must have been extemporaneous acting. Perhaps the performances gained in vivid power and effect what they lost in finish from the nervous strain and excitement of such a mental effort as they were called upon to make. It is difficult to account for the success of the play unless the acting was superlatively good. It is overlaid with bombast and claptrap, and, as Pitt said, was but a second-rate re-echo of his speeches on the Hastings trial. For no one but the "hapless genius" would the brother and sister have thus thrown to the winds all their artistic traditions. We hear of the inflexible John saying, when irritated past bearing: "I know him thoroughly, all his paltry tricks and artifices"; yet immediately after we find both him and the great actress submitting to all his whims and eccentricities.

There is an amusing story told by Boaden of a supper at beautiful Mrs. Crouch's, when Kemble arrived charged with his grievances, and full of threats, expecting to meet Sheridan. Presently in came the culprit, light and airy as usual. The great actor looked unutterable things, occasionally emitting a humming sound like that of a bee, and groaning inwardly in spirit. Some little time elapsed, when at last, like a "pillar of state," slowly uprose Kemble, and thus addressed the proprietor:

"I am an eagle whose wings have been bound down by frosts and snows, but now I shake my pinions and cleave into the genial air into which I am born."

After having thus offered his resignation, he solemnly resumed his seat. Sheridan, however, undaunted, used all his arts of fascination to mitigate his wrath, and at an early hour of the morning both went away in perfect harmony.

Then we have Mrs. Siddons's opinion of him:—

"Here I am," she writes, "sitting close in a little dark room in a little wretched inn, in a little poking village called Newport Pagnell. I am on my way to Manchester, where I am to act for a fortnight, from whence I am to be whirled to Liverpool, there to do the same. From thence I skim away to York and Leeds; and then, when Drury Lane opens—who can tell? For it depends upon Mr. Sheridan, who is uncertainty personified. I have got no money from him yet, and all my last benefit, a very great one, was swept into his treasury, nor have I seen a shilling of it. Mr. Siddons has made an appointment to meet him to-day at Hammersley's. As I came away very early, I don't know the result of the conference; but unless things are settled to Mr. Siddons's satisfaction,

he is determined to put the affair into his lawyer's hands."

The affair was never put into any lawyer's hands; she allowed herself to be mollified, and might well write of Sheridan in 1796:—

"Sheridan is certainly the greatest phenomenon that nature has produced for centuries. Our theatre is going on, to the astonishment of everybody. Very few of the actors are paid, and all are vowing to withdraw themselves; yet still we go on. Sheridan is certainly omnipotent. I can get no money from the theatre; my precious two thousand pounds are swallowed up in that drowning gulf, from which no plea of right or justice can save its victims."

John Kemble remained manager of Drury Lane for some years, sometimes withdrawing for a time and refusing to manage the affairs any longer, and again wheedled back by Sheridan's powers of persuasion. At last, wearied out, both brother and sister finally withdrew from Drury Lane in 1802, and took shares with Harris in Covent Garden Theatre. Harris was the direct opposite of Sheridan, punctual in his payments and honourable in his dealings. Mrs. Inchbald arranged all the monetary portion of the affair. The concern was valued at £138,000, of which Harris represented one half; the remainder being divided among four proprietors, of whom Lewis, the actor, was one. Lewis after a time became anxious to dispose of his share, and Kemble purchased it for the sum of £23,000; a friend of his, a Mr. Heathcote, advancing him a large amount to enable him to do so. The Kemble family all joined him in this venture. The company included Mrs. Siddons, Charles Kemble, Mr. and Mrs. Henry Siddons, and Cooke, the well-

known actor. As soon as Kemble had completed his arrangements, he went abroad for some months, visiting Spain and France. On his return a dinner was given by the managers of Covent Garden to their Drury Lane rival, Sheridan, who made a sarcastic speech on the friendship of fellows who had hated each other all their lives. John Kemble then went abroad again, for a time, to recruit his strength after the anxiety and worry of his years of management.

Mrs. Kemble, in a letter written to her husband during his absence, describes a very smart party at the "Abercorn," at which the Prince of Wales, and the Devonshire, Melbourne, Castlereagh, and Westmoreland families were present, and says signicantly at the end: "Mrs. Sheridan came in a very elegant chariot, four beautiful black horses and two footmen. The Duchess had only one. Mrs. Sheridan had a fine shawl on, that he, Sheridan, said he gave forty-five guineas for, a diamond necklace, ear-rings, cross, cestus, and clasps to her shoulders, and a double row of fine pearls round her neck." This was shortly after Mrs. Siddons's last benefit, when the brilliant Brinsley had swept the proceeds into his own pocket.

The very "ravages of fire," however, which they "scouted" by the help of "ample reservoirs" that were exhibited on the stage the night of the inauguration, by a "lake of real water," and a "cascade tumbling down," were the ravages that were destined to destroy the splendours of the new building. The misfortune of fire that ruined Kemble was destined, also, to ruin Sheridan, who had staked his all on this one enterprise. Drury Lane was destroyed as Covent Garden was rising from its ashes. The glare of the burning building lit up the Houses of Parliament during a late

sitting. One of the members suggested an adjournment of the House. With a spice of the highly-flavoured bombast he had lately so frequently offered his theatrical audiences, Sheridan opposed the idea :— "Whatever may be the extent of the calamity to me personally, I hope it will not interfere with the public business of the country," he said; and quitting the assembly, he betook himself to one of the coffee-houses in Covent Garden, where he was found swallowing port by the tumblerful a few hours later. One of the actors expressed his surprise and disgust at seeing him there. "Surely a man may be allowed to take a glass of wine by his own fireside?" was Sheridan's ready answer.

CHAPTER XII.

HERMIONE.

It sends a pang through our heart as we hear Mrs. Siddons say in later life, with a sigh, to Rogers the poet: "After I became famous, none of my sisters loved me so well." What a price to pay for fame! "Conversation" Sharp was frequently consulted by her upon private affairs. She wept to him over the ingratitude her sisters showed her. Money was lent and never repaid; the prestige of her name was borrowed to obtain theatrical engagements, but she never was thanked; every obligation seemed only to cause a feeling of bitterness. Perhaps the fault lay a little on her side as well as on theirs. Tact and graciousness were not her strong points. She was absent-minded, all her attention being concentrated on the study and comprehension of her profession, which gave her a proud, self-contained manner, alienating unconsciously those who surrounded her and were dependent on her. Her children adored her, but her brothers and sisters stood, to a certain extent, in awe of her. All of them, stimulated by the examples of the two eldest, went on the stage, but none possessed her genius, or John Kemble's talent and industry. The affectionate com-

radeship in art that existed between Mrs. Siddons and John Kemble is one of the pleasantest features in both their lives.

He was educated, as we have seen, principally at the Roman Catholic College at Douay, where he became remarkable for his elocution, every now and then astonishing his masters and schoolfellows by delivering speeches in scholastic Latin, and learning with the greatest facility books of Homer and odes of Horace. We are told that his noble cast of countenance, his deep melodious voice, and the dignity of his delivery, impressed his comrades considerably; especially in the scene between Brutus and Cassius, which he got up for their benefit. It is a curious proof of his want of facility that, although he was extremely fond of the study of language, grammar being all his life his favourite *light reading*, he never was able to master any language but his own. He read Italian, Spanish, and French, but spoke none of them, in spite of his education in France and his long residence later at Lausanne. He had no ear, and it never could have been an easy task to him to learn the rhythm of Shakespeare. We know the story of old Shaw, conductor of the Covent Garden orchestra, who vainly endeavoured to teach him the song in the piece of *Richard Cœur de Lion*, "O Richard—O mon roi!" "Mr. Kemble, Mr. Kemble, you are murdering the time, Sir!" cried the exasperated musician; on which Kemble made one of the few jokes ever perpetrated by him: "Very well, Sir, and you are for ever beating it."

After six years' residence at Douay he made up his mind that he was not suited to the church, and left for England, determined to follow his father's profession. He landed at Bristol in that very December,

1775, that his sister made her unfortunate "first appearance" before the London public. Dreading his parents' wrath, he made his way to Wolverhampton, and there joined a company under the direction of a Mr. Crump and a Mr. Chamberlain. After going through all the humiliations and privations of a penniless actor, but also after enjoying the valuable hours of study and stern discipline of a stroller's life, we find the future Hamlet, by the aid of his sister, Mrs. Siddons, enabled to get his foot on the first round of the ladder. Mr. Younger, manager of the Liverpool Theatre, gave him an engagement in 1778. We find him afterwards playing at Wakefield with Tate Wilkinson's York company, and actually permitted to act Macbeth at Hull. By the aid of quiet industry and determination he was working his way to the goal he had in view. He perpetrated a tragedy, *Belisarius*, that was given on the same occasion at Hull, wrote poetry which he burnt, gave lectures on oratory, and, in fact, passed through the curriculum necessary to the full completion of his powers.

On the 30th September 1783, John Kemble first appeared in London, at Drury Lane, as Hamlet. The fiery criticisms launched against this performance by the press, show that at least it was distinguished by originality. Whatever its faults might be, they were unanimous in declaring his reading to be scholarly and refined. He is said, in studying the part of Hamlet, to have written it out no less than forty times. Some time elapsed before he appeared in the same piece as his sister; other actors had possession of the parts, and he had to bide his time. That patient waiting on opportunity, however, was one of the great Kemble

gifts; there was no impatience, no complaining, but a steady, dogged power of perseverance, with the profound conviction of their own capabilities to make use of fortune when it came. At last he appeared as Stukeley to his sister's Mrs. Beverley, in *The Gamester*. Finely as the part was played, the sister, not the brother, carried away the honours of the performance.

After this, on several benefit nights they were able to appear together, Kemble replacing Smith in the character of Macbeth to Mrs. Siddons's Lady Macbeth, and both of them acting later in *Othello*, he as the Moor, she as Desdemona. This was not a distinct success. At last, however, his power found its legitimate development. On the occasion of his sister's benefit in January 1788, he acted Lear to her Cordelia. The town was electrified, and declared him equal to Garrick. Boaden tells us "that he never played it so grandly or so touchingly as on that night."

His really great gift was his large and cultivated understanding, that enabled him to grasp the spirit of the author he sought to interpret, giving a new emphasis and truth to scenes that were hackneyed and stale by a conventional method of rendering. This was particularly the case with Shakespeare, whose beauties he and his sister first revealed to their generation. The difference, however, between them was that he possessed superlative talent, she possessed genius. In speaking to Reynolds the dramatist, she defined completely the difference between them, "My brother John, in his most impetuous bursts, is always careful to avoid any discomposure of his dress or deportment, but in the whirlwind of passion I lose all thoughts of such matters."

He is said to have nourished a tender affection for

the "Muse"—beautiful, clever, fascinating, stuttering Mrs. Inchbald. When her husband died, it was universally said he would marry her. Fanny Kemble tells an incident that occurred long after Kemble was married. Mrs. Inchbald and Miss Mellon were sitting by the fire-place in the green-room, waiting to be called upon the stage. The two were laughingly discussing their male friends and acquaintances from the matrimonial point of view. John Kemble, who was standing near, at length jestingly said to Mrs. Inchbald, who had been comically energetic in her declarations of whom she could or would or never could or would have married, "Well, Mrs. Inchbald, would you have had me?" "Dear heart," said the stammering beauty, turning her sweet sunny face up to him, "I 'd have j-j-j-jumped at you!"

The lady he did eventually marry was no beauty and no "Muse," but, much to the indignation of Mrs. Siddons, as people said at the time, a very ordinary young woman, daughter of a Mr. and Mrs. Hopkins, prompter and actress at Drury Lane. Priscilla, however, made him a good wife, and he never had cause to regret his choice.

The next brother to John, Stephen, although almost born on the stage, had none of the requisites either of talent or facility to make him a good actor. Only a few days before John's first appearance in London, Stephen appeared before the public as Othello. It was said that the manager had made a mistake, and had engaged the "big" instead of the "great" Mr. Kemble. Stephen's great boast all his life was that he was the only actor who could play Falstaff "without stuffing." His qualifications were those of a boon companion rather than of an actor. He very soon

quitted the London stage and became manager of a provincial theatre.

Frances, the great actress's second sister, inherited a considerable portion of the family beauty, but little dramatic power, and what she had was rendered inoperative by her unconquerable shyness. Mrs. Siddons first brought her out at Bath. The papers vented their spleen against the elder sister on the younger. It was natural, they said, that she should wish to bring her forward, but they hoped she had learned, by the utter failure of her attempt, not to "cram incapable actresses down the throats of the public." One of the theatrical critics, Steevens, fell in love with her; but his proposals being rejected, he became her bitterest enemy.

Mrs. Siddons writes to tell Dr. Whalley of this love affair:—"My sister Frances is not married, and, I believe, there is very little reason to suppose she will be soon. In point of circumstances, I believe, the gentleman you mention would be a desirable husband; but I hear so much of his ill-temper, and know so much of his caprice, that, though my sister, I believe, likes him, I cannot wish her gentle spirit linked with his."

Mrs. Siddons had judged her sister's suitor exactly. The engagement was soon broken off, and the girl married Mr. Twiss, another dramatic critic, whom Fanny Kemble, in her *Records of a Girlhood*, describes as a grim-visaged, gaunt-figured, kind-hearted gentleman and profound scholar, who, it was said, at one time nourished a hopeless passion for Mrs. Siddons. The Twisses later set up a genteel seminary at Bath, where fashionable young ladies were sent "to be bettered." Mrs. Twiss died in October 1822, and Mr.

Twiss in 1827. Mrs. Siddons ever kept up the most affectionate intercourse with them, and their son Horace Twiss was her favourite nephew.

Her next sister, Elizabeth, though apprenticed to a mantua-maker, was soon bitten with the dramatic enthusiasm of the family. She obtained an engagement through the influence of her famous sister, but made no way in London; and after her marriage with Mr. Whitelock, one of the managers of the Chester company, in 1785, she went with him to America, where she seems to have had some success.

Mrs. Whitelock, we are told, was a taller and fairer woman than Mrs. Siddons. When she returned to England years later, she wore an auburn wig, which, like the tall cap that surmounted it, was always on one side. She was a simple-hearted, sweet-tempered woman, but very imperfectly educated. Her Kemble name, face, figure, and voice helped her in the United States, but her own qualifications were but meagre. Nothing could be droller, we are told, than to see her with Mrs. Siddons, of whom she looked like a clumsy, badly-finished imitation. Her vehement gestures and violent objurgations contrasted comically with her sister's majestic stillness of manner; and when occasionally Mrs. Siddons would interrupt her with "Elizabeth, your wig is on one side," and the other replied, "Oh, is it?" and, giving the offending head-gear a shove, put it quite as crooked in the other direction, and proceeded with her discourse, Melpomene herself used to have recourse to her snuff-box to hide the dawning smile on her face.

Another sister, Jane, appeared in Lady Randolph at Newcastle when she was nineteen. She had all the Kemble faults in acting carried to excess. She was,

besides, short and fat; and when a character in the play, describing her death, said, "She ran, she flew, like lightning up the hill," the audience roared with laughter. Shortly after this discouraging attempt she married a Mr. Mason, of Edinburgh, and retired from the profession. She died in 1834, leaving a husband, five sons, and a daughter, who almost all went on the stage. With one unfortunate exception, the Kemble family were remarkable for their decorous, well-regulated lives. Although all the brothers married actresses, their children were admirably brought up, and their households models of propriety. The unfortunate exception we mentioned was Ann Curtis, the fourth sister. To a woman of Mrs. Siddons's proud, sensitive temper, the vagaries of this wretched woman must have been painful beyond expression. She was said to be lame, which prevented her going on the stage. In 1783, the year of her great triumph in London, the young actress had the pleasure of reading in all the papers the following advertisement. Under the guise of charity it is easy to see the motive that prompted it, and shows the envy and malignity that pursued her during her career.

DONATIONS IN FAVOUR OF MRS. CURTIS, YOUNGEST SISTER OF MRS. SIDDONS.

A *private* individual, whose humanity is far more extensive than her means, having taken the case of the unfortunate MRS. CURTIS into consideration, pitying her youth, respecting her talents for the stage, which, unhappily, misfortune has rendered useless, and desirous to restore a useful member to Society, earnestly entreats the interference of a generous public in her behalf, that she may be enabled by the efforts of humanity to procure such necessaries as may be requisite to relieve her immediate distress, and for her getting her bread by needlework, artificial flowers, &c., in which she is well skilled, and in which she will be happy to be well employed. Mrs. Curtis is the youngest sister of *Messrs. Kemble* and *Mrs. Siddons*, whom she has

repeatedly solicited for relief, which they have flatly refused her; it therefore becomes necessary to solicit, in her behalf, the benevolent generosity of that public who have so liberally supported *them*.

> Deny not to Affliction Pity's tear,
> For Virtue's fairest when she aids Distress!
> Mrs. Curtis's *Search After Happiness.*

Donations will be thankfully received at Mr. Ayre's, Printer of the Sunday *London Gazette* and *Weekly Monitor*, &c., No. 5 Bridges Street, opposite Drury Lane Theatre; and at No. 21 King Street, Covent Garden.

All efforts to reclaim her being unavailing, she gradually descended lower and lower in the social scale. Rumours were circulated of her having attempted to poison herself, and again her brother and sister were accused of undue harshness; but almost everything connected with the case points to their having done all they could, though she proved perfectly irreclaimable.

During the latter part of her life she was allowed a small annuity of twenty pounds a year, which was continued to her in Mrs. Siddons's will. She lived until 1838.

Charles, who approached more nearly in intellectual powers to his celebrated sister and brother than any of the others, was nearly twenty years younger than Mrs. Siddons. When thirteen years of age, he was sent by John Kemble to Douay College, where he remained three years. He appeared at Drury Lane in 1794. He was a gentlemanly, refined actor; there were certain characters which he made entirely his own. Charles married, in 1806, an actress of the name of De Camp. Like Mrs. Garrick, she had been a ballet-dancer, and had come over from Vienna, brought by Garrick with the rest of the troupe. In consequence of a riot directed against the employment of foreigners, the greater part of the troupe was obliged to return to

Vienna. Miss De Camp, however, remained, learnt English, and, by dint of perseverance, achieved a good position at Drury Lane. They had three children—Adelaide, who sang professionally, but soon left the stage to marry Mr. Sartoris; Fanny, authoress of the *Record of a Girlhood,* who became Mrs. Butler; and a son, John Mitchell Kemble. Charles Kemble suffered much from deafness during the latter years of his life, and was entirely ruined by his gift of the share in Covent Garden valued at £50,000. Mrs. Siddons reappeared for his benefit on the 9th June 1819.

Mrs. Siddons had five children who lived to grow up—Henry, who was born at Wolverhampton on the 4th October 1774; Sarah Martha, born at Gloucester, November 5th, 1775; Maria, born at Bath, July 1st, 1779; George, born in London, December 27th, 1785; and Cecilia, born July 25th, 1794. She sent her son Henry to France to study under Le Kain. He went on the stage, but had none of the qualifications of a good actor.

Mrs. Siddons, with her usual sensible acceptance of things as they were, tried to make the best of his powers. On the occasion of his first appearance, she writes to Mrs. Inchbald from Bannister's, where she was stopping with her friend Mrs. Fitzhugh:—

"I received your kind letter, and thank you very much for the interest you have taken in my dear Harry's success. It gives me great pleasure to find that Mr. Harris appreciates his talents, which I think highly of, and which, I believe, will grow to great perfection by fostering, on the one hand, and care and industry on the other. I have little doubt of Mr. Harris's liberality, and none of the laudable ambition of my son to obtain it. It is so long since I have felt any-

thing like joy, that it appears like a dream to me, and I believe I shall not be able quite to convince myself that this is real till I am present 'to attend the triumph and partake the gale.' I am all anxiety and impatience to hear the effect of Hamlet. It is a tremendous undertaking for so young a creature, and where so perfect a model has been so long contemplated. I was frightened when I yesterday received information of it. Oh! I hope to God he will get well through it. Adieu, dear Muse."

Henry Siddons soon quitted the stage, married a Miss Murray, daughter of an actor, and herself an actress, and in 1808 became manager of the Edinburgh Theatre.

The death of her daughter Maria was the first serious grief Mrs. Siddons had known. We have touched on Lawrence the painter's proposal to her, and the transference of his affection, after a short engagement, to her sister Sarah. Mrs. Siddons did everything she could to soften the blow to the poor deserted girl. We find her writing in desperation to her old friend Tate Wilkinson :—

"My plans for the summer are so arranged that I have no chance of the pleasure of seeing you. The illness of my second daughter has deranged all schemes of pleasure as well as profit. I thank God she is better; but the nature of her constitution is such that it will be long ere we can reasonably banish the fear of an approaching consumption. It is dreadful to see an innocent, lovely young creature daily sinking under the languor of illness, which may terminate in death at last, in spite of the most vigilant tenderness. A parent's misery under this distress you can more easily imagine than I can describe; but if

you are the man I take you for, you will not refuse me a favour. It would, *indeed,* be a great comfort to us all, if you would allow our dear Patty to come to us on our return to town in the autumn, to stay with us a few months. I am sure it would do my poor Maria so much good, for the physician tells me she will require the same confinement and the same care the next winter; and let it not offend the pride of my good friend when I beg it to be understood that I wish to defray the expense of her journey. Do, dear soul, grant my request. Give my kind compliments to your family, my love to my own dear Patty, and accept yourself the best and most cordial wishes of

"S. SIDDONS."

From this time until Mrs. Siddons's death, Patty Wilkinson never left her house, and remained ever the intimate and beloved friend of her and her daughters.

Maria was taken to Clifton at the doctor's suggestion, while Mrs. Siddons went a provincial tour to make money enough to meet the heavy demands upon her purse. At last even the poor mother saw all efforts were unavailing, and when, on the 6th October 1798, the blow at last came, she met it with resignation and courage. To Mrs. Fitzhugh she wrote:—

"Although my mind is not yet sufficiently tranquillised to talk much, yet the conviction of your undeviating affection impels me to quiet your anxiety so far as to tell you that I am tolerably well. This sad event I have been long prepared for, and bow with humble resignation to the decree of that merciful God who has taken to Himself the dear angel I must ever tenderly lament. I dare not trust myself further. Oh! that you were here, that I might talk to you of

her death-bed—in dignity of mind and pious resignation far surpassing the imagination of Rousseau and Richardson in their Heloïse and Clarissa Harlowe; for hers was, I believe, from the immediate inspiration of the Divinity."

Troubles now began to fall thick and heavy. Mr. Siddons, actuated by a morbid jealousy of his wife's energy and success, entered into a connection with Sadler's Wells Theatre without consulting her, or even taking her into his confidence. A considerable amount of her savings were sacrificed to save him from his ill-advised venture. In spite of ill-health and lassitude, however, we find her unmurmuringly taking up her burden to make good the loss. On the 14th of July 1801 she writes again to Mrs. Fitzhugh:—

"In about a fortnight I expect to commence my journey to Bath. Mr. Siddons is there, for he finds no relief from his rheumatism elsewhere. His accounts of himself are less favourable than those of anyone who writes to me about him; but I hope and trust that we shall find him better than he himself thinks; for I know by sad experience with what difficulty a mind, weakened by long and uninterrupted suffering, admits hope, much less assurance. I shall be here till next Saturday, and after that time at Lancaster till Tuesday, the 28th; thence I shall go immediately to Bath, where I shall have about a month's quiet, and then begin to play at Bristol for a few nights. 'Such resting finds the sole of unblest feet!' *When* we shall come to London is uncertain, for nothing is settled by Mr. Sheridan, and I think it not impossible that *my* winter may be spent in Dublin; for I must go on *making* to secure the few comforts that I have been able to attain for myself and my family. It is provi-

dential for us all that I can do so much; but I hope it is not wrong to say that I am tired, and should be glad to be at rest indeed. I hope yet to see the day when I can be quiet. My mouth is not yet well [she had had an attack of erysipelas, the disease that was ultimately to kill her], though somewhat less exquisitely painful. I have become a frightful object with it for some time, and, I believe, this complaint has robbed me of those poor remains of beauty once admired—at least, which, in your partial eyes, I once possessed."

She did not go to Dublin, but returned early in the following year to Drury Lane, where she performed above forty times.

On the 25th March 1802 she performed for the first time Hermione in the *Winter's Tale*. The enacting of this part is to be counted amongst her great successes. It was more suitable to her age and appearance than others that she undertook in later life. On the second or third night she had a narrow escape of being burned to death. We can give the incident as related in a letter to Mrs. Fitzhugh :—

"London, April 1802.

". . . Except for a day or two, the weather has been very favourable to me hitherto. I trust it may continue so, for the *Winter's Tale* promises to be very attractive; and, whilst it continues so, I am bound in honour and conscience to put my shoulder to the wheel, for it has been attended with great expense to the managers, and, if I can keep warm, I trust I shall continue tolerably well. As to my plans, they are, as usual, all uncertain, and I am precisely in the situation of poor Lady Percy, to whom Hotspur comically says :

'I trust thou wilt not utter what thou dost not know.' This must continue to be the case, in a great measure, whilst I continue to be the servant of the public, for whom (and let it not be thought vain) I can never sufficiently exert myself. I really think they receive me every night with greater and greater testimonies of approbation. I know it will give you pleasure to hear this, my dear Friend, and you will not suspect me of deceiving myself in this particular. The other night had very nearly terminated *all* my exertion, for whilst I was standing for the statue in the *Winter's Tale,* my drapery flew over the lamps that were placed behind the pedestal. It caught fire, and had it not been for one of the scene-men, who most humanely crept on his knees and extinguished it without my knowing anything of the matter, I might have been burnt to death, or, at all events, I should have been frightened out of my senses. Surrounded as I was with muslin, the flame would have run like wildfire. The bottom of the train was entirely burned. But for the man's promptitude, it would seem as if my fate would have been inevitable. I have well rewarded the good man, and I regard my deliverance as a most gracious interposition of Providence. There is a special providence in the fall of a sparrow. Here I am safe and well, God be praised! and may His goodness make me profit, as I ought, by the time that is vouchsafed me."

We later find her making every exertion to rescue the son of the man who had saved her, from punishment for desertion.

"I have written myself almost blind for the last three days, worrying everybody to get a poor young

man, who otherwise bears a most excellent character, saved from the disgrace and hideous torture of the lash, to which he has exposed himself. I hope to God I shall succeed. He is the son of the man—by me ever to be blest—who preserved me from being burned to death in the *Winter's Tale*. The business has cost me a great deal of time, but if I attain my purpose I shall be richly paid. It is twelve o'clock at night; I am tired very much. To-morrow is my last appearance. In a few days I shall go to see my dear girl, Cecilia. How I long to see the darling! Oh! how you would have enjoyed my *entrée* in Constance last night. I was received really as if it had been my first appearance in the season. I have gone about to breakfasts and dinners for this unfortunate young man, till I am quite worn out with them. You know how pleasure, as it is called, fatigues."

CHAPTER XIII.

SORROWS.

Though still suffering from enfeebled health, Mrs. Siddons again made up her mind to visit Dublin in the spring of 1802. A strange depression, partly the result of physical weakness, and partly the result of mental anxiety, came over her courageous spirit, paralysing all energy, and breaking down her usual calm composure. We find this woman, who to the outside public presented a cold and hard exterior, weeping hysterically on taking leave of her friends. She told Mr. Greatheed she felt that before they met again a great affliction would have fallen on them both. They never did meet till after the death of his son Bertie and her daughter Sarah. To Mrs. Piozzi she wrote:—

"May 1802.

"Farewell, my beloved friend—a long, long farewell! Oh, such a day as this has been! To leave all that is dear to me. I have been surrounded by my family, and my eyes have dwelt with a foreboding tenderness, too painful, on the venerable face of my dear father, that tells me I shall look on it no more.

I commit my children to your friendly protection, with a full and perfect reliance on the goodness you have always manifested towards me.

"Your ever faithful and affectionate

"S. SIDDONS."

The mother's heart could have hardly had a foreboding of the second affliction about to fall on her then. A few weeks after she had taken her departure from Marlborough Street, Sally describes to Patty Wilkinson, who had accompanied Mrs. Siddons, picnics and parties she and her friend Dorothy Place had attended, much to their amusement and delight. The girl gives an account also of her brother Henry's marriage with Miss Murray, who, she says, "looked very beautiful in a white chip hat, with a lace cap under it, her long dark pelisse tied together with purple bows ready for travelling," and mentions how she and Dorothy "laughed uproariously" at a play they had "attended." Yet death had already laid his hand on this bright young life.

Mrs. Siddons proceeded on her melancholy journey, stopping to pay a visit to Shakespeare's house at Stratford, and thence to North Wales, where, at Conway Castle and Penman Mawr, they did the tourist business of gazing at sunsets through ruined windows, and listening to Welsh harpers harping below. "In that romantic time and place," Campbell tells us in his ambiguous way, Mrs. Siddons "honoured the humblest poet of her acquaintance by remembering him; and, let the reader blame or pardon my egotism as he may think fit, I cannot help transcribing what the Diarist adds: Mrs. Siddons said: 'I wish that Campbell were here.'"

The bathos is complete when, the poet tells us, on Miss Wilkinson's authority, that while looking at a magnificent landscape of rocks and water, a lady within hearing of them exclaimed in ecstasy: "This awful scenery makes me feel as if I were only a worm, or a grain of dust, on the face of the earth." Mrs. Siddons turned round and said, "I feel very differently!"

She spent two months acting successfully in Dublin; then she went to Cork, and then to Belfast. On her return to Dublin she received the news of the death of her father at the ripe age of eighty-two. Although not unexpected, the severance of this life-long affection, coming, as it did, at a time when other sorrows and anxieties weighed on her, was a trying blow, and we find her writing to Dr. Whalley with a certain irritation that betrays her state of mind, and also betrays her attitude towards her husband at this time on money matters.

"I thank you for your kind condolence. My dear father died the death of the righteous; may my last end be like his, without a groan. With respect to my dear Mrs. Pennington, my heart is too much alive to her unhappy situation, and my affection for her too lively, to have induced the necessity of opening a wound which is of itself too apt to bleed. Indeed, indeed, my dear Sir, there was no occasion to recall those sad and tender scenes to soften my nature; but let it pass. You need not be informed, I imagine, that such a sum as £80 is too considerable to be immediately produced out of a woman's quarterly allowance; but, as I have not the least doubt of Mr. Siddons being ready and willing to offer this testimony of regard and gratitude, I beg you will arrange the business with him immediately. I will write to him this

day, if I can find a moment's time. If you can devise any quicker mode of accomplishing your amiable purpose, rely upon my paying the £80 within the next six months. For God's sake do not let it slip through. If I knew how to send the money from here, I would do it this instant; but, considering the delay of distance, and the caprice of wind and sea, it will be more expeditiously done by Mr. Siddons. God bless and restore you to perfect health and tranquillity."

We can read between the lines of this letter, as we know that about this time she received a pressing request from her husband for money to fit out their son George for India, and to pay debts incurred on the decoration of the house in Great Marlborough Street, suggesting that in consequence she had better accept an engagement in Liverpool. She preferred, however, though harassed by disagreements with Jones the manager, to remain in Dublin. A report was circulated, as on the occasion of her first visit to Ireland, that she had refused to play for the benefit of the Lying-in Hospital, a charity much patronised by the Dublin ladies. She indignantly refuted this accusation, ending with words that show her state of mental suffering :—

"It is hard to bear at one and the same time the pressure of domestic sorrow, the anxiety of business, and the necessity of healing a wounded reputation; but such is the rude enforcement of the time, and I must sustain it as I am enabled by that Power who tempers the wind to the shorn lamb."

Her son George came and spent a fortnight with her before his departure for India, and the news from home concerning her daughter still seemed good. Like a thunderbolt, therefore, from a summer sky,

came a letter from Mr. Siddons addressed to Miss Wilkinson, saying that Sally was very ill, but begging her not to make Mrs. Siddons anxious by telling her. Miss Wilkinson, however, felt it to be her duty to show the letter. The mother's heart divined all that was not said. She declared her intention of starting for England without delay. A violent gale had blown for some days, and no vessel would leave the harbour. Two days later a reassuring letter came from Siddons addressed to his wife, telling her all was well again, and advising her to go to Cork. She went, but her miserable state of mind may be guessed from a letter addressed to Mrs. Fitzhugh :—

"Cork, March 21st, 1803.

"My Dear Friend,

"How shall I sufficiently thank you for all your kindness to me? You know my heart, and I may spare my words, for, God knows, my mind is in so distracted a state, that I can hardly write or speak rationally. Oh! why did not Mr. Siddons tell me when she was first taken so ill? I should then have got clear of this engagement, and what a world of wretchedness and anxiety would have been spared to me! And yet—good God! how should I have crossed the sea? For a fortnight past it has been so dangerous, that nothing but wherries have ventured to the Holy Head; but yet I think I should have put myself into one of them if I could have known that my poor dear girl was so ill. Oh! tell me all about her. I am almost broken-hearted, though the last accounts tell me that she has been mending for several days. Has she wished for me? But I know—I feel that she has. The dear creature used to think it weakness in

me when I told her of the possibility of what might be endured from illness when that tremendous element divides one from one's family. Would to God I were at her bedside! It would be for me then to suffer with resignation what I cannot now support with any fortitude. If anything could relieve the misery I feel, it would be that my dear and inestimable Sir Lucas Pepys had her under his care. Pray tell him this, and ask him to write me a word of comfort. Will you believe that I must play to-night, and can you imagine any wretchedness like it in this terrible state of mind? For a moment I comfort myself by reflecting on the strength of the dear creature's constitution, which has so often rallied, to the astonishment of us all, under similar serious attacks. Then, again, when I think of the frail tenure of human existence, my heart fails and sinks into dejection. God bless you! The suspense that distance keeps me in, you may imagine, but it cannot be described."

Meantime, no letters came. The winds raged without, and no vessel could cross. At the end of the week the news that arrived was not satisfactory. She made up her mind to throw up her engagement at any cost, and return. She and Patty Wilkinson set out for Dublin; there they were again detained, and received no news. Nearly beside herself with anxiety, she again appealed to Mrs. Fitzhugh:—

"Dublin, April 2nd, 1803.

"I am perfectly astonished, my dear Friend, that I have not heard from you after begging it so earnestly. Good God! what can be the reason that intelligence must be extorted, as it were, in circumstances like

mine? One would think common benevolence, setting affection quite aside, might have induced some of you to alleviate as much as possible such distress as you know I must feel. The last letter from Mr. Siddons stated that she was better. Another letter from Mr. Montgomery, at Oxford, says that George gave him the same account. Why—why am I to hear this only from a person at that distance from her, and so ill-informed as the writer must be of the state of her health? Why should not you or Mr. Siddons have told me this? I cannot account for your silence at all, for you know how to feel. I hope to sail to-night, and to reach London the third day. God knows when that will be. Oh God! what a home to return to, after all I have been doing! and what a prospect to the end of my days."

At last she was able to cross to Holyhead. At Shrewsbury she received a letter from Mr. Siddons confirming the worst accounts of Sally's illness, but begging her to "remember the preciousness of her own life, and not to endanger it by over-rapid travelling." As she read, Miss Wilkinson was called from the room; a messenger had arrived with the news of the girl's death. Mrs. Siddons guessed what had happened by the expression of Miss Wilkinson's face when she returned, and, sinking back speechless, lay for a day "cold and torpid as a stone, with scarcely a sign of life."

Her own family came forward with consolation and help. Her brother John wrote a letter, which she received at Oxford; her brother Charles came to meet her, and conducted her on her first visit to her widowed mother. Every other grief had sunk into insignificance by the side of the death of her daughter.

So worn out was she with misery and overwork, that the doctors recommended the quiet and bracing air of Cheltenham. We get a glimpse of her frame of mind in a letter addressed thence to her friend Mrs. Fitzhugh in June 1803:—

"The serenity of the place, the sweet air and scenery of my cottage, and the medicinal effect of the waters, have done some good to my shattered constitution. I am unable at times to reconcile myself to my fate. The darling being for whom I mourn is assuredly released from a life of suffering, and numbered among the blessed spirits made perfect. But to be separated for ever, in spite of reason, and in spite of religion, is at times too much for me. Give my love to dear Charles Moore, if you chance to see him. Have you read his beautiful account of my sweet Sally? It is done with a truth and modesty which has given me the sincerest of all pleasures that I am now allowed to feel, and assures me still more than ever that he who could feel and taste such excellence was worthy of the particular regard she had for him."

The life out of doors at Birch Farm, reading "under the haystack in the farm-yard," rambling in the fields, and "musing in the orchard," gradually soothed the poignancy of her grief. "Rising at six and going to bed at ten, has brought me to my comfortable sleep once more," she writes. "The bitterness and anguish of selfish grief begins to subside, and the tender recollections of excellence and virtues gone to the blessed place of their eternal reward, are now the sad though sweet companions of my lonely walks."

In spite of all her stoicism and resolve, however, the

sense of her loss would come back, carrying away all artificial barriers of restraint.

"If he thinks himself unfortunate," she wrote of a friend, "let him look on *me* and be silent—'the inscrutable ways of Providence.' Two lovely creatures gone, and another is just arrived from school with all the dazzling frightful sort of beauty that irradiated the countenance of Maria, and makes me shudder when I look at her. I feel myself like poor Niobe grasping to her bosom the last and youngest of her children; and, like her, look every moment for the vengeful arrow of destruction. Alas! my dear Friend, can it be wondered at that I long for the land where they are gone to prepare their mother's place? What have I here? Yet here, even here, I could be content to linger still in peace and calmness—content is all I wish. But I must again enter into the bustle of the world; for though fame and fortune have given me all I wish, yet while my presence and my exertions here may be useful to others, I do not think myself at liberty to give myself up to my own selfish gratification. The second great commandment is 'Love thy neighbour as thyself,' and in this way I shall most probably best make my way to Heaven."

How inscrutable, indeed, are the ways of Providence. Sally was her eldest daughter and her dearest child. She had been born two months before that terrible period of probation and failure at Drury Lane. Hers were the baby fingers, hers the baby voice, that had coaxed the poor young mother back to resignation and courage. She was twenty-seven when she was taken, and had ever been the sunshine of the home. Yes, she was the dearest. Strange that, deaf to our anguish and suffering, those are so often they who are

taken. If a heart in such a trial can still believe and trust and love, then it is faith indeed—heaven-born, sublime. And such, we see, was the broken-hearted mother's.

During her stay at Birch Farm, John Kemble, Charles Moore, and Miss Dorothy Place, her daughter Sally's particular friend, came to stay with her. In July they all of them made an excursion along the Wye, after which she paid a visit to her friend Mr. Fitzhugh at Bannister's, and then returned to London, where she made an engagement to act the following winter at Covent Garden.

Other trials awaited Mrs. Siddons, trials that, to a woman of her proud and sensitive temper, must have been torture in the extreme. Whatever her sufferings had been in the course of her professional career, from scandal and misrepresentation, her character as a wife and mother had been untouched. Now, when no longer young, and anxious to escape from the harassing turmoil of the stage into the dignity and calm of a domestic life, surrounded by her children and friends, a blow fell on her under which, for the time, she almost sank. The circumstance is not alluded to either by Campbell or Boaden, but is so interwoven with Mrs. Siddons's existence, and so colours her mode of thought at the time, that it can hardly be passed over.

Mrs. Siddons met Katherine Galindo, author of the libel, at the theatre in Dublin. She was a subordinate actress, and her husband a fencing-master. It is difficult to understand how she can have become so intimate, except that her own perfect sincerity and openness led her to bestow confidence on a variety of persons, many of them not in any way

worthy of it. Her daughter, Cecilia, who later wrote *Recollections* of her mother, says that, instead of being hard and calculating, as the outside public imagined, her mother was, on the contrary, too easy—too much disposed to be ruled by people inferior in every way to herself, credulous to an extraordinary extent, always trusting to appearances, and never willing to suspect anyone. Perhaps, also, the great actress's weakness was a wish to "make use" of people, and a love of flattery—both dangerous qualities for a woman in her position, laying her open, as they did, to the machinations of adventurers. Be it as it may, we are astounded at the girlish sentimentality of the letters she wrote to the Galindos. Allowing even for the Laura Matilda style of expression of the period, they show the substratum of romanticism that underlies her character. The Galindos accompanied her to Cork, and then to Killarney. Mrs. Siddons used all her influence to induce Harris, of Covent Garden, to give Mrs. Galindo an engagement; but Kemble, when he arrived from abroad, refused to ratify it. A letter from Mrs. Inchbald says :—

"When Kemble returned from Spain in 1803, he came to me like a madman, said Mrs. Siddons had been imposed upon by persons whom it was a disgrace to her to *know*, and he begged me to explain it so to her. He requested Harris to withdraw his promise of his engaging Mrs. G. at Mrs. Siddons's request. Yet such was his tenderness to his sister's sensibility, that he would not undeceive her himself. Mr. Kemble blamed me, and I blamed him for his reserve, and I have never been so cordial since. Nor," ends Mrs. Inchbald, with the prim self-sufficiency quite consistent with what we know of the

"dear Muse," "have I ever admired Mrs. Siddons so much since; for, though I can pity a dupe, I must also despise one. Even to be familiar with such people was a lack of virtue, though not of chastity."

We read later in Rogers's *Table Talk* that, not long before Mrs. Inchbald's death he met her walking near Charing Cross, and we are not astonished to be told that she had been calling on several old friends, but had seen none of them—some being really not at home, and others denying themselves to her. "I called," she said, "on Mrs. Siddons. I knew *she* was at home, yet I was not admitted."

To return, however, to the Galindos. The wretched woman was stung to the quick by the withdrawal of her engagement at Covent Garden, and although Mrs. Siddons advanced a thousand pounds to the husband to buy a share in a provincial theatre, and showed them much kindness, the jealous and infuriated wife published in pamphlet form a wild and libellous attack on the great actress, to which she added the letters that had passed between them in their days of intimacy. By artfully turning and suppressing sentences here and there, she succeeded in giving a significance never intended in the originals. Although she said she had advanced nothing but what she could substantiate by the most certain evidence, if called upon to do so, she gave no proof whatever except of her own wild jealousy and unreasoning disappointment at being refused an engagement at Covent Garden.

It seems incredible that a woman of Mrs. Siddons's social knowledge can have been so imprudent as to enter into such an intimacy, and to write in such a strain of deep affection to people she had

known only so short a time. The following is a specimen :—

"Holyhead, Sunday, 12 o'clock.

"For some hours we had scarce a breath of wind, and the vessel seemed to leave your coast as unwillingly as your poor friend. About six o'clock this morning the snowy tops of the mountains appeared; they chilled my heart, for I felt that they were emblematic of the cold and dreary prospect before me. Mr. —— has been very obliging; he has just left us, but it is probable we shall meet again upon the road. I thought you would be glad to know we were safely landed. I will hope, my beloved friends, for a renewal of the days we have known, and in the meantime endeavour to amuse and cheer my melancholy with the recollection of *past joys*, though they be 'sweet and mournful to the soul.'

"God bless you all, and do not forget

"Your faithful, affectionate,

"S. Siddons."

A little later she writes :—

"Pray ask Mr. G—— to send me those sweet lines 'To Hope'—that which he gave me is almost effaced by my tears—and let it be written by the same hand. I could never describe what I have lost in you, my beloved friends, and the sweet angel that is gone for ever! Good God! what a deprivation in a few days. Adieu! Adieu!"

Needless to say, this "screeching" friendship ended as one might expect. As we have said, she failed to obtain an engagement for Mrs. Galindo at Covent Garden, and lent Galindo a thousand pounds to help

him to take shares in a theatrical company at Manchester. He never repaid the thousand pounds, and became abusive when she asked for it. She accused him, in a letter addressed to Miss Wilkinson, of "hypocrisy and ingratitude," and the wife accused her of having nourished an affection passing the bounds of propriety for her husband. All her real friends mustered round her, but she suffered terribly.

She wrote to Dr. Whalley :—

"Among all the kind attentions I have received, none has comforted me more, my dear friend, than your invaluable letter. I thank God all my friends are exactly of your opinion with respect to the manner of treating this diabolical business. To a delicate mind publicity is in itself painful, and I trust that a life of tolerable rectitude will justify my conduct to my friends. I have been dreadfully shaken, but I trust that the natural disposition to be well will shortly restore me. My dear Cecilia is, indeed, all a fond mother can wish."

CHAPTER XIV.

WESTBOURNE FARM.

JOHN KEMBLE was now both actor and manager at Covent Garden, and the results were much more satisfactory in every way to Mrs. Siddons. Harris the proprietor was strictly punctual in his payments, and the Kemble family, who numbered Charles Kemble in their ranks, were sufficient to make the performances attractive enough to the public. Mrs. Siddons appeared in several of her old parts; amongst others in Elvira, when the actor Cooke came on so drunk as to be unable to act his part. He did not improve matters by attempting to excuse himself. He could only articulate, "Ladies and Gentlemen, my old complaint," when he was removed, and Henry Siddons had to read his part. Fit pendant to the night when he appeared as Sir Archy Macsarcasm with Johnstone, who was playing Sir Calaghan. There was a dead pause: At last Johnstone, advancing to the footlights, said with a strong brogue, "Ladies and Gentlemen, Mr. Cooke *says* he can't spake," which bull was received with roars of laughter and hisses.

The great actress performed sixty times that season.

At its conclusion she went on a visit to Mrs. Damer at Strawberry Hill, where she met Louis Philippe, afterwards King of France, and the Prince Regent. The two ladies, whenever they were together, indulged their passion for sculpture. As winter approached she suffered much from rheumatism, and, for the sake of country air, removed from Great Marlborough Street to a cottage at Hampstead for a few weeks. Mr. Siddons, who was also a martyr to rheumatism, had advocated the change, and the old gentleman was much delighted with his new abode. He ate his dinner, and, looking out at the beautiful view that stretched before the windows, observed, "Sally, this will cure all our ailments." In spite of his hopes, however, Mrs. Siddons was confined to bed for weeks with acute rheumatism. She tried electricity with some beneficial effect, but suffered anguish while undergoing the treatment.

As the winter advanced they returned to town; but Mr. Siddons grew so much worse that he resolved to try the waters of Bath. Mrs. Siddons parted, therefore, with her house in Marlborough Street, and took lodgings for herself and Miss Wilkinson in Princes Street, Hanover Square. Her landlord there was an upholsterer of the name of Nixon. He and his wife always talked afterwards with the deepest affection of Mrs. Siddons. One day, looking at Nixon's card, she found that he was also an undertaker, and said laughingly, "I engage your services to bury me, Mr. Nixon." Twenty-seven years afterwards Nixon did so.

During the winter and spring of 1804 and 1805 Mrs. Siddons only performed twice at Covent Garden, partly in consequence of delicate health, partly in

consequence of the appearance of Master Betty, the "young Roscius," a prodigy whom the public ran after with an enthusiasm that seems inexplicable. Managers gave him sums that a Garrick or a Siddons were unable to obtain; his bust was done by the best sculptors; his portrait painted by the best artists, and verses written in a style of idolatrous adulation were poured upon this boy of thirteen. Actors and actresses were obliged to appear on the stage with him to avoid giving offence. Mrs. Siddons and Kemble, with praiseworthy dignity, retired while the infatuation lasted. She went to see him, however, and gave him what praise she thought his due. Lord Abercorn came into her box, declaring it was the finest acting he had ever seen. "My lord," she answered, "he is a very clever, pretty boy, but nothing more."

Independently of the boy Betty, or any other trials in her profession, Mrs. Siddons now began to long for rest. We have seen how years before, when in Dublin, she had expressed herself to Dr. Whalley: "I don't build any castles, but cottages without end. May the great Disposer of all events but permit me to spend the evening of my toilsome, bustling day in a cottage where I may sometimes have the converse and society which will make me more worthy those imperishable habitations which are prepared for the spirits of just men made perfect!"

In the April of 1805 she satisfied this wish by taking a cottage at Westbourne, near Paddington. With the help of Nixon she fitted it up luxuriously, built an additional room behind for a studio, and laid out the shrubbery and garden. Westbourne was then, we are told, one of those delightful rural spots for which Paddington was distinguished. It occupied a rising

ground, and commanded a lovely view of Hampstead, Highgate and the distant city. Mrs. Siddons's was a small retired house, in a garden screened with poplars and evergreens, resembling a modest rural vicarage, standing, it is said, on the site now levelled for the Great Western Railway Station. She loved, she said, to escape from "the noise and din of London" to the green fields surrounding her new home.

Here her friends congregated round her also. Miss Berry and Madame D'Arblay both mention, in their diaries, having spent an afternoon and met many people at Mrs. Siddons's country retreat.

"I spoke in terms of rapture of Mrs. Siddons to Incledon," Crabb Robinson tells us. "He replied, 'Ah! Sally's a fine creature. She has a charming place on the Edgware Road. I dined with her last year, and she paid me one of the finest compliments I ever received. I sang *The Storm* after dinner. She cried and sobbed like a child. Taking both of my hands she said, "All that I and my brother ever did is nothing compared with the effect you produce."'"

The following lines were written by Mr. Siddons, describing his wife's country retreat, during the last visit he ever paid to it :—

1.

Would you I'd Westbourne Farm describe;
I'll do it then, and free from gall,
For sure it would be sin to gibe
A thing so pretty and so small.

2.

The poplar walk, if you have strength,
Will take a minute's time to step it;
Nay, certes, 'tis of such a length,
'Twould almost tire a frog to leap it.

3.

But when the pleasure-ground is seen,
Then what a burst comes on the view;
Its level walk, its shaven green,
For which a razor's stroke would do.

4.

Now, pray be cautious when you enter,
And curb your strides from much expansion;
Three paces take you to the centre,
Three more, you 're close against the mansion.

5.

The mansion, cottage, house, or hut,
Call 't what you will, has room within
To lodge the King of Lilliput,
But not his court, nor yet his queen.

6.

The kitchen-garden, true to keeping,
Has length and breadth and width so plenty;
A snail, if fairly set a-creeping,
Could scarce go round while you told twenty.

7.

Perhaps you 'll cry, on hearing this,
What! everything so very small?
No; she that made it what it is
Has greatness that makes up for all.

Mr. Siddons passed some weeks at Westbourne, but, finding the rheumatism from which he suffered only relieved at Bath, he was obliged to reside there almost permanently. Bath did not agree with Mrs. Siddons, and the exigencies of her profession obliged her to live in London. This difference in their place of abode caused a rumour to get abroad that a formal separation had taken place. Mr. Boaden, indeed, states explicitly that Siddons became at this time somewhat impatient of the "crown matrimonial," while Campbell declares the report to be "absolutely unfounded."

In judging the case we think, perhaps, a medium course would be the best to take. We can imagine a decided incompatibility in the husband's and wife's mode of seeing things. She was ever impatient towards want of energy and practical capacity, while he, all his life having to play second to her, was jealous of the disposal of her earnings, and rushed into ill-judged investments and speculations.

The following letter of good-humoured banter, written to him on the 16th December 1804, reveals the manner in which she turned off his weak ebullitions of temper :—

"My dear Sid.,

"I am really sorry that my little flash of merriment should have been taken so seriously, for I am sure, however we may differ in trifles, *we can never cease to love each other.* You wish me to say what I expect to have done. I can expect nothing more than you yourself have designed me in your will. Be (as you ought to be) the master of all while God permits; but, in case of your death, only let me be put out of the power of any person living. This is all that I desire; and I think that you cannot but be convinced that it is reasonable and proper.

"Your ever affectionate and faithful,

"S. S."

The wife's was the stronger, more powerful mind, and with her sincerity and openness of disposition which impelled her to show everything she thought or felt, we have no doubt she often offended the irritable vanity of a man who, in small things, had a painful sense of his own dignity. Hers was too big a nature

to nag and fight about trifles, and at the same time often too self-absorbed to remember how she offended the susceptibilities of others.

"To live in a state of contention," she writes, "with a brother I so tenderly love, and with a husband with whom I am to spend what remains of life, would be more than my subdued spirit and almost broken heart would be able to endure. In answer to the second, I can only say that the testimony of the wisdom of all ages, from the foundation of the world to this day, is childishness and folly, if happiness be anything more than a *name*; and, I am assured, our own experience will not allow us to refute the opinion. No, no, it is the inhabitant of a better world. Content, the offspring of Moderation, is all we ought to aspire to *here*, and Moderation will be our best and surest guide to that happiness to which she will most assuredly conduct us."

In the season of 1806–7, at Covent Garden, she played Queen Katherine seven times, Lady Macbeth (to Cooke's Macbeth) five times, Isabella (*Fatal Marriage*) twice, Elvira twice, Lady Randolph once, Mrs. Beverley once, Euphrasia once, and Volumnia fifteen times. We see by this enumeration of her parts how she, and she alone, achieved popularity for Shakespeare.

The subsequent season at Covent Garden was uncommonly short, and extended only to the 11th of December 1807, when the *Winter's Tale* was announced for her last appearance before Easter. As events turned out, it proved to be her last for the season. Immediately after the performance she went to Bath, where she spent six weeks with Mr. Siddons. He was so much improved in health as to make plans

for the future, and declared his intention of spending a part of the summer at Westbourne. She left him, therefore, comparatively free from anxiety in February 1808. Within a month of her departure, however, he was seized with a violent attack of illness, and on the 11th of March expired. She immediately threw up her engagement in Edinburgh, and left for her London home. Thence, on the 29th March 1808, she wrote to Mrs. Piozzi :—

"How unwearied is your goodness to me, my dear friend. There is something so awful in this sudden dissolution of so long a connexion, that I shall feel it longer than I shall speak of it. May I die the death of my honest, worthy husband; and may those to whom I am dear remember me when I am gone, as I remember him, forgetting and forgiving all my errors, and recollecting only my quietness of spirit and singleness of heart. Remember me to your dear Mr. Piozzi. My head is still so dull with this stunning surprise that I cannot see what I write. Adieu! dear soul; do not cease to love your friend.—S. S."

So ended the love story begun thirty-three years before.

Before the end of the year she resumed her cap and bells again, but had only acted on one or two nights at Covent Garden before it was burnt to the ground. How the fire originated is a mystery. Some said that the wadding of a gun, in the performance of *Pizarro,* must have lodged unperceived in the crevice of the scenery. Miss Wilkinson declared afterwards, that before the audience left the house she perceived a strong smell of fire while sitting in Mr. Kemble's box, and on her way to Mrs. Siddons's dressing-room mentioned it to some of the servants; they declared

it to be the smell of the foot-lights. How complete and rapid the destruction was we learn by the following letter written by Mrs. Siddons to her friend James Ballantyne.

"My dear and estimable Friend,

"You have by this time, I am confident, felt many a humane pang, for the wretched sufferers in the dreadful calamity which has been visited on me and those most dear to me. The losses to the Proprietors are incalculable, irreparable, and of all the precious and curious dresses and lace and jewels which *I* have been collecting for these thirty years—not one, no, not one article has escap'd! The most grievous of these *my* losses is a piece of Lace which had been a Toilette of the poor Queen of France; it was upwards of four yards long, and more than a yard wide. It never could have been bought for a thousand pounds, but that's the least regret. It was *so* interesting!! But oh! let me not suffer myself in the ingratitude of *repining*, while there are so many reasons for thankful acknowledgment. My Brothers, God be praised! did not hear of the fire till ev'ry personal exertion would have been utterly useless. It is as true as it is strange and awful, that ev'rything appear'd to be in perfect Security at *Two* o'clock, and that at *six* (the time my poor brother saw it) the whole structure was as completely swept from the face of the earth as if such a thing had never existed. Thank God that it *was* so, since had it been otherwise, he wou'd probably have perished in exertions to preserve something from the terrible wreck of his property. This is comfort. And you, my noble-minded friend, wou'd, I am confident, participate the joy I feel, in beholding this ador'd brother,

Stemming this torrent of adversity with a manly fortitude, Serenity, and even *hope*, that almost bursts my heart with an admiration too big to bear, and blinds my eyes with the most delicious tears that ever fell from my eyes. Oh! he is a glorious creature! did not I always *tell* you so? Yes, yes, and all will go well with him again! *She* bears it like an Angel too. Lord Guilford and Lord Mountjoy have nobly offer'd to raise him any sum of money—and a thousand instances of generous feeling have already offer'd that evince the goodness of human nature, and its Sense of his worth. All this is so honorable to him, that I shall soon feel little regret except for the poor beings who perished in the devouring fire.

"James Ballantyne—God bless and prosper all the desires and designs of a heart so amiable, a head so sound! prays most fervently his truly affectionate friend,

"S. Siddons."

"My head is so confused I scarce know what I have written; but you wish'd me to answer your kind letter immediately, therefore excuse all defects."

The result of John Kemble's thirty years of hard service was swept away in the flames that destroyed Covent Garden. Mr. Heathcote's loan was still unpaid. Boaden gives us a tragi-comic account of a visit he paid at the Kembles' house the morning after the fire. Mrs. Kemble loudly expressing her sorrow. Charles Kemble sitting listening, a tragic expression on his naturally melancholy face; John shaving himself before the glass. "Yes," he said to his visitor

in the intervals of this operation, "it has perished—that magnificent theatre! It is gone, with all its treasures of every description; that library, which contained all those immortal productions of our countrymen; that wardrobe; the scenery. Of all this vast treasure, nothing now remains but the arms of England over the entrance of the theatre, and the Roman eagle standing solitary in the market-place."

All differences which were said to have arisen between brother and sister were sunk and forgotten in this crisis. Though she may have smiled at his sententiousness, and snubbed Mrs. Kemble's loud-voiced expressions of grief, she now gave him efficient help in reconstituting the theatre. The performances of the company were transferred first to the Opera House, and afterwards to the Haymarket Theatre. Between September 12th, 1808, and May 6th, 1809, she acted forty times. The wear and tear of this on a woman of her years—she was now over fifty—must have been great indeed. All seemed to turn to her, to depend on her masculine strength of will and energy.

Beside the anxiety of her profession, we find her occupied with the future of her children. Letter after letter could be quoted, showing the affectionate and practical interest she took in their welfare, in spite of the statement circulated, and believed in, that she bargained and haggled with her son Henry as though he were some manager with whom she was doing business. She wrote on November 26th, 1808, to Mr. Ingles on the subject of an expedition to Edinburgh, to help her son in his theatrical venture there:—

"Independently of any other consideration, it is a

great object to me to have a reasonable excuse for spending much of my remaining life in the admired and beloved society of Scotland; I am therefore, on my *own* account as *well* as his, naturally anxious for the Success of my Son in the Theatre, and I think I may without arrogance aver that you cou'd not chuse better. He has great qualifications and wou'd not be the worse, I apprehend, for my advice in respect to Dramatic business, or for the pecuniary aid which I should be proud to afford in order to amplify the costume of The Stage. His abilities as an Actor need not my eulogium, and his private respectability is so universally acknowledged as to spare his mother the pain of boasting. I have done my part, and trust the rest to heaven! I have written to all you advis'd me to write to, and now in one word let me thank you for your good counsel and assure you that whatever be the result I shall for ever consider myself exceedingly oblig'd to you. So much ambiguity and darkness seems to envelop the business (the Galindo embroglio), however, that I know not what to wish—but that there was an *end* of both hopes and fears; since nothing is so insupportable as Suspense."

Those who serve the public have much to suffer from the caprices of the crowd, but they also experience many proofs of the appreciation of their genius by individuals. The Kembles met with instances of kindness and friendliness at the moment of their need that strike one as almost fabulous in their generosity. The Duke of Northumberland offered Kemble a loan of ten thousand pounds on his simple bond. He hesitated to accept, fearing his inability to pay the interest. The Duke promised he should never be pressed for it, and on the day of the laying the first

stone he cancelled the bond, and made him a present of the whole sum.

Aided by the munificence of patrons, fifty thousand pounds was soon subscribed; nearly the same amount was received from the insurance companies, and on December 30th, 1808, the first stone was laid with Masonic honours. John Kemble was not a person to do away with the pomp of a ceremonial. All the actors and actresses were assembled; Mrs. Siddons, wearing a nodding plume of ominous black feathers, while her brother, who had risen from his sick bed, stood under the torrents of rain in white silk stockings and pumps.

In less than a twelvemonth from the time of its destruction the new theatre arose from the ashes of its predecessor. While it was building, Drury Lane, the opposition house, under Sheridan's management, was also burnt to the ground, bringing down Sheridan with it in its ruin.

The new Covent Garden was a much more magnificent building than its predecessor; but the system of private boxes, which had been introduced first of all in Drury Lane, was now carried to an extreme extent, and the third circle of the theatre was entirely given over to them. This invasion of the privileges of the people by the aristocracy was not to be borne. The "liberty of the subject" had been talked into fashion by Fox and Burke, and the populace were determined to put their doctrines into practice in every department of life. They would not submit, because the new house had the monopoly of catering for their amusement, to be slighted and thrust away in a dark gallery where they could neither see nor hear, while a "bloated aristocracy" lounged in commodious boxes

with ante-rooms behind. We who deplore the radicalism of the age, and the licence permitted to free speech, should read the account of the outrageous O. P. (old prices) riots, and congratulate ourselves on the improved decorum that reigns now-a-days.

The New House was opened on the 18th September 1809. Crowded to the roof with a resplendent audience, on whom shone the light shed by thousands of wax candles, with Kemble and Mrs. Siddons to act the parts of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, a brilliant inauguration might have been expected.

The National Anthem was sung, and then Kemble was to speak a poetical address. But the moment he made his appearance, dressed for Macbeth, a yell of defiance greeted him, while the mob in the pit stood up with their hats on and their backs to the stage. Kemble begged a hearing in vain. His sister then appeared, pale but determined, and both of them went through their parts to the end. Whenever for an instant there was a lull in the yelling and hissing, the musical voice of the great actress was heard steadily going through her part.

Two magistrates appeared on the stage and read the Riot Act; soldiers rushed in to capture the rioters, who let themselves down by the pillars into the lower gallery. The sight of the soldiery, indeed, only increased the Babel. "Why were prices raised," the mob vociferated, "while exorbitant salaries were paid to the actors and actresses? The money received by the Kembles and Madame Catalani amounted for the season to £25,575. There was Mrs. Siddons with £50 a night! The Lord Chief Justice sat every day in Westminster Hall from 9 to 4 for half the sum!". "She and her brother also appeared frequently on the

stage with clothes worth £500.* All this was to be screwed out of the pockets of the public."

The whole state of the popular mind at the time was suffering from the reflux of the revolutionary tide that had swept over France some years before. The way, indeed, in which the authorities behaved during the seventy nights the riots lasted, leads us to think that they were aware of the undercurrent of political excitement, and were glad to see it diverted into a channel that did not menace Church and State. In no other country in the world would such a state of things have been allowed to go on night after night. A magistrate now and then feebly appeared on the stage, and read inaudibly the Riot Act; On one occasion the public climbed the stage, and were only deterred from personally attacking the actors by the sudden opening of all the traps. A lady received an ovation for lending a pin to fasten a manifesto to one of the boxes, and the whole house was placarded with offensive mottoes. The proprietors had recourse to giving away orders to admit their own partisans. This led to furious fighting and scuffling. Pigeons were let loose, as symbols that the public were pigeoned; aspersions were cast on the morality of the private boxes; the leaders of the riot incited the crowd to further excesses by inflammatory speeches. On the sixth night Kemble came forward to announce that Catalani's engagement, one of the great grievances, was cancelled, and that the business books of the proprietors would be examined

* On the first night of the O. P. riots, we are told the actress wore a costume fashioned after the bridal suit of the unfortunate Queen of Scots, and was a perfect blaze with the jewels in the stomacher of the dress, as well as upon her hair and around her neck.

by competent gentlemen to prove that the theatre was not a paying concern. The report appeared, proving that if any reduction were made in prices, the proprietors would lose three-fourths per cent. on their capital. This statement had no effect on the unreasoning mob. On the reopening of the house on the 4th October, the riot began more furiously than ever. Cooke, unfortunately, in a prologue alluded to the late "hostile rage." The expression was like throwing a match into gunpowder. The people lashed themselves into a frenzy; they assailed the boxes, and ran up and down the pit benches during the play. Then, too, was introduced, we are told, the famous O. P. war-dance in the pit, which seems to have resembled the French *Carmagnole*, "with its calm beginning, its swelling into noise and rapidity, and its finale of demoniacal uproar and confusion." Princes of the Blood visited the boxes, and having beheld the spectacle, and heard the Babel of roaring throats, laughed and went home! Afterwards the crowd marched to Kemble's house, 89 Great Russell Street, Bloomsbury, and continued the riot there. At last arrests were made of the leaders, but they were acquitted, and Kemble consented to appear at the dinner given in their honour. This was a hauling down of the flag, but in reality the proprietors came off victors. The rate of admission to the pit was reduced by sixpence, but the half-price remained at two shillings. The private boxes were diminished, but the new price of admission was maintained. It must have been a bitter probation for proud tempers like the Kembles to go through.

"My appearance of illness was occasioned entirely," Mrs. Siddons writes about this time to a friend, "by an agitating visit that morning from poor Mr. John

Kemble, on account of the giving up of the private boxes, which, I fear, must be at last complied with. Surely nothing ever equalled the domineering of the mob in these days. It is to me inconceivable how the public at large submits to be thus dictated to, against their better judgment, by a handful of imperious and intoxicated men. In the meantime, what can the poor proprietors do but yield to overwhelming necessity? Could I once feel that my poor brother's anxiety about the theatre was at an end, I should be, marvellous to say, as well as I ever was in my life. But only conceive what a state he must have been in, however good a face he might put upon the business, for upwards of three months; and think what his poor wife and I must have suffered, when, for weeks together, such were the outrages committed on his house and otherwise, that I trembled for even his personal safety; she, poor soul! living with ladders at her windows in order to make her escape through the garden in case of an attack. Mr. Kemble tells me his nerves are much shaken. What a time it has been with us all—beginning with fire and continued with fury! Yet sweet sometimes are the uses of adversity. They not only strengthen family affection, but teach us all to walk humbly with our God,

"Yours,
"S. S."

The fury of the rioters was principally directed against John Kemble, "Black Jack," as he was called. They never lost a certain respect for the great actress who had served them so long and so faithfully. We know the story of her appealing through the windows of her sedan-chair to the riotous crowds assembled

round the theatre, "Good people, let me pass; I am Sarah Siddons," and of the mob immediately falling back to make way for the dignified Queen of Tragedy. The whole business disheartened and saddened her, however. "I have not always met gratitude in a play-house," Garrick said, and she but repeated his words with a sigh. She wrote to her daughter-in-law, Mrs. Henry Siddons:—

"Octr. Jubilee Day,
"Westbourne Farm,
"Paddington.

"My Dear Harriet,

"Mrs. Sterling has kindly undertaken to deliver a parcel to you, which consists of a Book directed to you at Westbourne, and a little Toy apiece for my dear little Girls. I would give you an account of our Theatrical Situation if my right hand were not so weak that it is with difficulty that I hold my pen—I believe you saw it blistered at Liverpool, and I am sorry to say it is but little better for everything I have try'd to strengthen it. However, the papers give, as I understand, a tolerably accurate account of this barbarous outrage to decency and reason, which is a National disgrace: where it will end, Heaven knows, and it is now generally thought, I believe, that it *will not* end without the interference of Government, and, if they have any recollection of the riots of the year '80, it is wonderful they have let it go thus far. I think it very likely that I shall not appear any more this season, for nothing shall induce me to place myself again in so painful and so degrading a situation. Oh, how glad am I that you and my dear Harry are out of it all! I long to hear how you are going on; tell me very soon that you are all well and prosperous, and happy. I find Mr. Harris is going to leave his house in Marlbro'

Street, and you will have to let it to some other tenant at the end of his term—I forget how long he took it for. There is a Print of Mrs. Fitzhugh's Picture coming out very soon; I am told it will be the finest thing that has been seen for many years. The Picture is more really like me than anything that has been done, and I shall get one for you and send it by the first opportunity. I have been amusing myself with making a model of Mrs. Fitzhugh, which everybody says is liker than anything that ever yet was seen of that kind. I hope there is modelling Clay to be had in Edinburgh, for, if it be possible, I will model a head of my dear Harry when I go there. Give him my love and my blessing. Accept the same for yourself and the darling children. Remember me kindly to all our friends, but most afftly. to dear Miss Dallas and the family of Hume. Patty will write to you by Mrs. Sterling; *her* letter will, I hope, be better written and more entertaining than mine. God bless you my dearest Harriet.

"Comps. whether it was his *Waft*, or himself.

"To Mrs. H. Siddons."

The riots were renewed on various occasions again; and though the frightened managers, by the aid of apologies and humiliations of all sorts, staved off a repetition of violence, the fate of the new house as a paying concern was sealed; it had been a mistake artistically and financially from the first, and soon ceased to be used as a theatre. A poodle drove Goethe's and Schiller's plays from the stage of the Weimar Theatre, the "dog Carlo" and Master Betty drove *Macbeth* and *Coriolanus* from Covent Garden; in both instances, the public was justified in its conclusions, but not in the manner in which it expressed them.

By their suppression of all applause and the restrictions they laid on their audience, the potentates of Weimer stopped all dramatic spontaneity; by the size and unwieldiness of the theatre they built, and the banishment of the lower part of the audience to a distance from the stage, the proprietors of Covent Garden deprived their art of the indispensable verdict of the ordinary public. The Kembles' school of dramatic art also was passing away. They had substituted for the naturalness and variety of Garrick's style a measured and stately dignity. This stateliness was now destined to be succeeded by the impetuosity and spontaneous passion of Kean.

We have seen that one of the boys introduced by John Kemble into the Witches' Scene in *Macbeth*, and subsequently turned away for disobedience, was named Edmund Kean. This little imp, undeterred by hardship, degradation, and misery, had developed into one of the greatest geniuses that ever trod the English stage. Many are the stories given of Mrs. Siddons's first meeting with Kean, but all are unanimous that it was by no means a creditable performance so far as the young actor was concerned. It was in Ireland, either at Belfast or Cork. Kean had been engaged to act with her. As usual, instead of learning his part, he employed the interim between her arrival and the play in drinking with some friends, with such success that when he came upon the stage the whole of his part had vanished from his memory; he was, therefore, obliged to improvise as he went on. Needless to say, his performance was a tissue of nonsense, sentences without meaning, drunken absurdities of all sorts. The audience was not a critical one, but Mrs. Siddons's disgust may be imagined. The next

play to be performed was *Douglas*, and in this Kean played Young Norval. Whether he was ashamed, and wished to show the great actress that he, too, was an actor, it is impossible to say, but he imparted such pathos and spirit to the part, that she was surprised into admiration. After the play (Kean himself tells us) she came to him, and patting him on the head, said: "You have played well, Sir. It 's a pity, but there 's too little of you to do anything."

When the "little man" arrived in London, Kemble and Mrs. Siddons announced their intention of honouring with their presence the new actor's performance of Othello. A relative of Kean, who was very anxious about the result of the Kemble decision, placed herself in a box opposite, to observe the effect the performance produced on them. The Queen of Tragedy sat erect and looked cold; Mr. Kemble gave a grave attention. But as the young actor warmed to his part, Mrs. Siddons showed a pleased surprise, and at last leaned forward, her fine head on her arm, quite engrossed in the scene, while Kemble expressed continual approbation, turning to his sister as each point told. At the triumphant close of the performance, Kean's friend approached the Kembles' box. Mrs. Siddons would not allow that this extraordinary genius was the lad that had acted with her before. "Perhaps," she said, "he had assumed the name of Kean." "Then the present one has every right to drop it," said Kemble; "he is not Kean, but the real Othello." Yet Kemble must have known that night that a greater than he had arisen. It must have been a noteworthy scene, those two remarkable figures of a by-gone age, sitting in judgment on "the little gentleman who," as Kemble said, "was always so terribly in earnest," while he fretted

and fumed on that stage, where he was destined to initiate a new ideal of dramatic art.

Macready gives an interesting account of his first meeting the great actress whom every young aspirant looked up to with such awe. It was at Newcastle; the *Gamester* and *Douglas* were the plays selected, and the young actor received the appalling information that he was to act with her. With doubt, anxiety, and trepidation he set about his work, the thought of standing by the side of the great mistress of her Art hanging over him *in terrorem*. At last she arrived, and he received orders to go to the Queen's Head Hotel to rehearse. The impression, he says, the first sight of her made on him recalled the page's description of the effect of Jane de Montfort's appearance on him in Joanna Baillie's tragedy. It was

> So queenly, so commanding, and so noble.

In her grand, but good-natured manner, having seen his nervousness, she said, "I hope, Mr. Macready, you have brought some hartshorn and water with you, as I am told you are terribly frightened at me," and she made some remarks about his being a very young husband. Her daughter Cecilia went smiling out of the room, and left them to the business of the morning.

Her instructions were vividly impressed on the young actor's memory, and he took his leave with fear and trembling. The audience were, as usual, encouraging, and the first scene passed with applause; but in the next—his first with Mrs. Beverley—his fear overcame him to that degree, that for a minute his presence of mind forsook him; his memory seemed to have gone, and he stood bewildered. She kindly whispered the word to him, and the scene proceeded.

The enthusiastic young actor goes on :—

She stood alone on her height of excellence. Her acting was perfect, and, as I recall it, I do not wonder, novice as I was, at my perturbation when on the stage with her. But in the progress of the play I gradually regained more and more my self-possession, and in the last scene, as she stood by the side wing, waiting for the cue of her entrance, on my utterance of the words, "My wife and sister! Well, well! there is but one pang more, and then farewell world!" she raised her hands, clapping loudly and calling out: "Bravo, Sir, bravo!" in sight of part of the audience, who joined in her applause.

On that evening I was engaged to a ball, "where all the beauties"—not of Verona, but of Newcastle—were to meet. Mrs. Siddons, after the play, sent to me to say, when I was dressed, she would be glad to see me in her room. On going in, she "wished," she said, "to give me a few words of advice before taking leave of me. You are in the right way," she said, "but remember what I say—study, study, study, and do not marry till you are thirty. I remember what it was to be obliged to study at nearly your age with a young family about me. Beware of that: keep your mind on your art, do not remit your study, and you are certain to succeed. I know you are expected at a ball to-night, so I will not detain you, but do not forget my words—study well, and God bless you." Her words lived with me, and often in moments of despondency have come to cheer me. Her acting was a revelation to me, which ever after had its influence on me in the study of my art. Ease, grace, untiring energy through all the variations of human passion, blended into that grand and massive style, had been with her the result of patient application. On first witnessing her wonderful impersonations I may say with the poet:

> "Then felt I like some watcher of the skies
> When a new planet swims into his ken."

And I can only liken the effect they produced on me, in developing new trains of thought, to the awakening power that Michael Angelo's sketch of the Colossal head in the Farnesina is said to have had on the mind of Raphael.

CHAPTER XV.

RETIREMENT.

What wonder that Mrs. Siddons now seriously began to think of retirement. Already, in 1805, she had written to a friend: "It is better to work hard and have done with it. If I can but add three hundred a year to my present income, I shall be perfectly well provided for; and I am resolved when that is accomplished to make no more positive engagements in summer. I trust that God in His great mercy will enable me to do it; and then, oh, how lazy, and saucy, and happy will I be! You will have something to do, I can tell you, my dear, to keep me in order." This longing now became a distinct determination.

In two letters written some time before, one to James Ballantyne and one to Lady Harcourt, she gave expression to this determination. To Lady Harcourt she wrote:—

"You see where I am, and must know the place by representations as well as reports, I daresay, at least my lord does, yea, 'every coigne and vantage' of this venerable pile, and envies me the view of it just before me where I am writing. This is an inn. I set myself down here for the advantage of pure air and perfect quiet, rather than lodge in Leeds, most disagreeable

town in His Majesty's dominions, God bless him. This day my task finishes. I have played there four nights, and am very tired of Kirkstall Abbey. It is too sombre for a person of my age, and I am no antiquarian. It is, however, extremely beautiful. I am going to York for a week, and I hope while I am there to hear from you, my ever dear Lady Harcourt. I must work a little while longer to realise the blessed prospect (almost, I thank God, within my view) of sitting down in peace and quiet for the remainder of my life. About £250 more a year will secure to me the comfort of a carriage, and, believe me, it is one of the favourite objects in that prospect that I shall have the happiness of seeing you and my dear Lord Harcourt often, very often; for though time and circumstances, and that proud barrier of high birth, have all combined to separate our persons, yet allow me the modest ambition to think our minds are kindred ones, and, on my part, united ever since I had the honour and good fortune to be known to you. How could it be otherwise, since to know you both is to esteem and love you? And now, my dear Lady Harcourt, I must leave you to dress for Belvidera. It is very sulky weather, and I am not i' the mood for acting, but I must play yet a little while longer, and then! how peaceful, how comfortable shall I be, after the storms, the tempests, and afflictions of my laborious life! God bless and preserve you, who are to make a large share of my happiness in that hour of peace."

To James Ballantyne she expresses herself in the same tenor:—

"I am wand'ring about the world to get a little more money. I am trying to Secure to myself the comfort

of a Carriage, which is now an absolute necessary to me, and then—then will I sit down in quiet to the end of my days. You will perhaps be surprised to hear that I am not abundantly rich, but you know not the expences I have incurred in times past and the losses I have Sustain'd; they drain ones purse beyond imagination. I shall be at York till the 15th inst., from thence I go to Birmingham where I shall remain till the 4th of August, from the 25th of August till the 1st of Septr. I shall be at Manchester and then return 'to that dear Hut my home.' You would scarcely know that Sweet little Spot it is so improv'd Since you Saw it. I believe tho' I wrote you about my new dining Room and the pretty Bedchamber at the end of it, where you are to sleep unannoyd by your former neighbours in their mangers, Stalls, I *shou'd* say, I believe. All the Lawrells are green and flourishing, all the wooden garden pales, hidden by Sweet Shrubs and flow'rs that form a verdant wall all round me: oh! it is the prettiest little nook in all the world, and I do hope you will Soon come and Say you *think* so. Your letter Surpris'd me in my *Garden of Eden*, where it found me, 'chewing the Cud of Sweet and bitter fancy,' you making that very moment the principal person in the Drama of my musings—and 'I said in my haste all men are liars.' It was more than probable that business, pleasure, illness and persons perhaps less deserving your regard, might have diverted recollection from one So distant So incapable of heightening the joys, alleviating the Sorrows of this 'working day world' and our hearts naturally yearn to those who Share our weal and woe. Yes, said I, his taste and feelings are alive to my talents; but he does not know me well enough to value me for Some

qualities of greater worth, which in the honest pride of my heart I will not blush to say I possess—he admires me for my Celebrity which is all he knows of me. No blame therefore attaches to him: he is ignorant of my real character, which if he knew he would also approve; at least if I am not much mistaken in myself and him—in myself I 'm sure I am not mistaken. It is a vulgar error to say we are ignorant of ourselves, for I am quite Surc that those who think at all Seriously *must know themselves* better than any other individual *can.*"

She had served the public for over thirty-five years, and was now in her fifty-sixth year. Long since the ten thousand pounds, which was the original sum with which in the heyday of her prosperity she said she would rest content, had been doubled. Some of this had been unfortunately invested by Mr. Siddons, and some had been lost in Sheridan's bankruptcy; but still, for a person who had no very expensive personal tastes, whose children were all provided for, it was a handsome provision.

Physical disabilities also began now to interfere with her dramatic effects. Alas! for thc days when an "exquisite, fragile, creature" acted Venus in Garrick's procession, and with her rosy lips whispered promises of sweatmeats into little Tommy Dibdin's ear. The actress had grown stout and unwieldy in person. When she acted Isabella, and knelt to the Duke, imploring mercy for her brother, two attendants had to come forward to help her to rise; and to make this appear correct, the same ceremony was gone through with a young actress who performed the same part and did not need any assistance whatever. By caricatures and portraits done of her at the time we

can see how unshapely she had become. Conventionality and hardness replaced the old spontaneity and pathos; the action of the arms was more pronounced, the voice was unduly raised, and the deficiency in beauty and charm was supplied by energy and rant. Mrs. Siddons was only two years older than her brother, but her physical and mental gifts had deteriorated much more rapidly. The fact of the sister's dramatic power having been a natural gift, and his the result of industry and hard work, made hers fail more completely with waning strength. Besides all the disabilities of advancing age, that terrible fear of being supplanted was ever before her eyes. Mrs. Jordan had some years before snatched the laurels from her brow in Rosalind; now rumours were wafted across the Channel of a young and lovely actress, Miss O'Neill, who had taken all hearts captive as Juliet (a part Mrs. Siddons could never personate satisfactorily); the matchless beauty of form of the young aspirant, her sensibility and tenderness were the theme of every tongue. "To hear these people talk, one would think *I* had never drawn a tear," she said sadly.

The old sensitiveness and pride remained. She accused the public of taking pleasure in mortifying their old favourites by setting up new idols; "I have been three times threatened with eclipse, first by means of Miss Brunton (afterwards Lady Craven), next by means of Miss Smith, and lastly by means of Miss O'Neill; nevertheless," she added, "I am not yet extinguished." Mrs. Siddons had no right to complain. She had drunk fully the draught of success and appreciation, and had been singularly exempt from rivalry in her own particular walk. No public, however indulgent, can save an actress

from the penalties of old age. She herself had supplanted Mrs. Crawford, and not very gently. The transition point—the last in her life—had been reached, the chapter of active professional life was closed for ever, yet she could not resign herself to accept the decrepitude and inactivity of old age. "I feel as if I were mounting the first steps of a ladder conducting me to another world," she sighed. Moore mentions meeting her at the house of Rogers :

"Mrs. Siddons came in the evening; had a good deal of conversation with her, and was, for the first time in my life, interested by her off the stage. She talked of the loss of friends, and mentioned herself as having lost twenty-six friends in the course of the last six years. It is something to *have had* so many. Among other reasons for her regret at leaving the stage was, that she always found in it a vent for her private sorrows, which enabled her to bear them better; and often she has got credit for the truth and feeling of her acting when she was doing nothing more than relieving her own heart of its grief."

She took her professional farewell of the stage on the 29th of June 1812. As early as three o'clock in the afternoon people began to assemble about the pit and gallery doors, and at half-past four the mob was so great, that those who had come early, in the hope of getting a good place, were carried away by the rush of the increasing crowd under the arches. So great was the concourse of people, that not more than twenty of the weaker sex obtained places in the pit, and the house was crammed in every part. The play was *Lady Macbeth.* When the great actress made her appearance, she was received with thunders of applause; for a moment emotion overcame her, but, collecting herself, she went

through her part as magnificently as in the early days. Often have old play-goers described the scene on that night. The grand pale face; the pathetic voice on the stage, speaking its last to those whom it had delighted and thrilled for so many years. While among the audience, the heart-felt sorrow, the deep silence, only broken by smothered sobs; then the irrepressible burst of feeling when the scene, in which she appears for the last time in *Lady Macbeth* was over, for the audience could bear it no longer. The applause continued from the time of her going off till she again appeared, to speak her address. When silence was restored, she began the following farewell, written by her nephew Horace Twiss :—

Who has not felt how growing use endears
The fond remembrance of our former years ?
Who has not sigh'd, when doom'd to leave at last
The hopes of youth, the habits of the past,
Ten thousand ties and interests, that impart
A second nature to the human heart,
And wreathing round it close, like tendrils, climb,
Blooming in age, and sanctified by time!

Yes! at this moment crowd upon my mind
Scenes of bright days for ever left behind,
Bewildering visions of enraptured youth,
When hope and fancy wore the hues of truth,
And long forgotten years, that almost seem
The faded traces of a morning dream!
Sweet are those mournful thoughts: for they renew
The pleasing sense of all I owe to you,
For each inspiring smile, and soothing tear—
For those full honours of my long career,
That cheer'd my earliest hope and chased my latest fear.

And though for me those tears shall flow no more,
And the warm sunshine of your smile is o'er;
Though the bright beams are fading fast away
That shone unclouded through my summer day;

Yet grateful memory shall reflect their light
O'er the dim shadows of the coming night,
And lend to later life a softer tone,
A moonlight tint—a lustre of her own.

Judges and Friends! to whom the magic strain
Of nature's feeling never spoke in vain,
Perhaps your hearts, when years have glided by,
And past emotions wake a fleeting sigh,
May think on her whose lips have poured so long
The charm'd sorrows of your Shakespeare's song:
On her, who, parting to return no more,
Is now the mourner she but seemed before;
Herself subdued, resigns the melting spell,
And breathes, with swelling heart, her long,
Her last Farewell.

As she reached the end, all stage exigency and restraint was forgotten, her voice was broken by real sobs. As soon as the hush of emotion had passed, the audience seemed suddenly to awake to the fact that it really was the last time they would ever see the marvellous actress, whom at one time they had almost idolised. Not satisfied with their usual method of expressing their feelings, they stood upon the seats, and cheered her, waving their hats for several minutes. It appeared to be the wish of the majority of the audience that the play should conclude with this scene, the curtain was therefore dropped; but Kemble came forward, and announced that, if it was the wish of the house, the play should proceed. The audience was divided, and the farce of *The Spoilt Child* began, amidst loud acclamation from one side and disappointment from the other. This continued during the whole of the first act, with constant cries of "The fifth act! the fifth act!" It was found impossible to allay popular excitement; the house was all noise and confusion, and the voices on the stage were

totally inaudible. The curtain was, therefore, again dropped; and the audience, shortly after, quietly dispersed.

So vanished from her sight that world over which, for the space of thirty-five years, she had reigned supreme, that world that made her joy and sorrow; before which, in spite of the many temptations that had beset her, she could feel with pride she had never degraded the supreme gift of genius. Amidst her poignant regrets, at least she had nothing tragic, nothing irremediable, to mourn, like so many of her sisters in the same profession. Differences of opinion had come between her and them, but all that was forgotten now in the anguish of "Farewell." She only remembered that first night of triumph, its terrors, and its delicious ecstasy; the weeks, months, and years of appreciated happy work, dreams fulfilled; parts she had studied and conned as a young girl, unconscious of the future in store for her, acted with overwhelming success. No Arabian Night's Dream of good fortune could have been more brilliant or more complete; but, as in all things human, the reaction had set in. She had touched such heights, that there must necessarily be a reflux.

She had loved her profession, not only for the measure of applause, but for the daily bustle and work, which, to a woman of her energetic temperament, was enjoyable in itself.

Rogers tells us that, sitting with her of an afternoon, years after the curtain had dropped on her farewell performance, she would vividly recall every moment of her stage life. "This is the time I used to be thinking of going to the theatre: first came the pleasure of dressing for my part; and then, the plea-

sure of acting it; but that is all over now." In her early days even, she always confessed that her spirits were not equal, and her internal resources were too few for a life of solitude.

After long years spent amidst the intoxication of applause, to withdraw into the twilight of private life must always be a great trial. The nightly stimulus, the mental habit of studying for a certain object, the production of evanescent emotions and transitory effects, must have a deteriorating effect on the noblest disposition. Shrewd Miss Berry, in her Journal, dated February 24th, 1811, mentions a visit she paid at Westbourne. "Mrs. Siddons received me, as she always does, in a manner that flattered my internal vanity, for she has the germ of a superior nature in her, though burnt up by the long-continued brand of popular applause"; and Fanny Kemble writes: "What a price my Aunt Siddons has paid for her great celebrity! Weariness, vacuity, and utter deadness of spirit. The cup has been so highly flavoured, that life is absolutely without sorrow or sweetness to her now, nothing but tasteless insipidity. She has stood on a pinnacle till all things have come to look flat and dreary; mere shapeless, colourless, level monotony to her. Poor woman! What a fate to be condemned to! and yet how she has been envied as well as admired!"

We doubt if the weariness and vacuity was as great as her niece was inclined to think. Advanced age and impaired powers always bring a certain deadness and indifference; but she had mental resources the young girl did not take into consideration. She kept a large circle of firm and attached friends. She was not without intellectual pursuits. Although showing no

particular genius in any other department of life but the stage, she had a fine cultivated taste for artistic and beautiful things. She employed much of her time in modelling, and executed many respectable pieces of work. Her childish love of Milton revived again now, and after her retirement she published a small volume of extracts from his poems. Above all, she had the support and consolation of a pure unswerving religious faith; through her chequered life of triumph and bereavement, joy and sorrow, Sarah Siddons had ever kept that alive in her heart. It saved her in many a crisis, and illumined the darkened road that lay before her.

The following verses, written by her at this time, are a truer indication of her frame of mind than any conclusions drawn from external observation by outsiders:—

Say, what's the brightest wreath of fame,
But canker'd buds, that opening close;
Ah! what's the world's most pleasing dream,
But broken fragments of repose?

Lead me where peace with steady hand
The mingled cup of life shall hold;
Where Time shall smoothly pour his sand,
And Wisdom turn that sand to gold.

Then haply at Religion's shrine
This weary heart its load shall lay,
Each *wish* my fatal love resign,
And passion melt in tears away.

She had now leisure for journeys abroad and the enjoyment of intellectual pleasure outside her profession which she had never had before. In the autumn of 1814 she made an excursion to Paris in company

with her brother John, her youngest daughter, Cecilia, and Miss Wilkinson. A short interval of peace then reigned, and all interested in art flocked from England to see the treasures that Napoleon had plundered from every European capital. The Apollo Belvidere, amongst others, had been set up in the statuary hall of the Louvre; and Campbell tells us how, giving his arm to Mrs. Siddons, they walked down the hall towards it, and stood gazing rapt in its divine beauty. "I could not forget the honour," Campbell tells us, quaintly, "of being before him in the company of *so august a worshipper*; and it certainly increased my enjoyment to see the first interview between the paragon of Art and that of Nature."

The "paragon of Nature" was evidently much struck, and remained standing silently gazing for some time; then she said, solemnly, "What a great idea it gives us of God, to think that He has made a human being capable of fashioning so divine a form!"

As they walked round the hall, Campbell tells us, he saw every eye fixed upon her. Her stately bearing, her noble expression, made a sensation, though the crowd evidently did not know who she was, as he heard whispers of "Who is she? Is she not an Englishwoman?"

Crabb Robinson, in his *Memoirs,* also tells us that he heard someone say in the Louvre, "Mrs. Siddons is below." He instantly left the Raphaels and Titians and went in search of her. She was walking with her sister, Mrs. Twiss. He noticed her grand air and fascinating smile, but he was disturbed that so glorious a head should have been covered with a small chip hat. She knit her brows, also, to look at the pictures, as if her sight were not good; and he remarked a

line or two about her mouth, and a little coarseness of expression. She remained two months in Paris, and we hear of her going to a review held by the King. She was seen toiling along towards the Champs de Mars, heated and flushed, and in clouds of dust; and a joke is made on the subject of her "saving."

Further suffering was in store for her in the death of her son Henry. He died of consumption, like his sisters. Manager of the Edinburgh Theatre, and in the prime of life, his loss was a great one both to his family and the Edinburgh public. His poor mother wrote:—

"Westbourne, 1815.

"This third shock has, indeed, sadly shaken me, and, although in the very depths of affliction, I agree with you that consolation may be found, yet the voice of nature will for a time overpower that of reason; and I cannot but remember 'that such things were, and were most dear to me.'

"I am tolerably well, but have no voice. This is entirely nervousness, and fine weather will bring it back to me. Write to me, and let me receive consolation in a better account of your precious health. My brother and Mrs. Kemble have been very kind and attentive, as indeed they always were in all events of sickness or of sorrow. The little that was left of my poor sight is almost washed away by tears, so that I fear I write scarce legibly. God's will be done!"

Later, she complained:—

"I don't know why, unless that I am older and feebler, or that I am now without a profession, which forced me out of myself in my former afflictions, but the loss of my poor dear Henry seems to have laid a

heavier hand upon my mind than any I have sustained. I drive out to recover my voice and my spirits, and am better while abroad; but I come home and lose them both in an hour. I cannot read or do anything else but puddle with my clay. I have begun a full-length figure of Cecilia; and this is a resource which fortunately never fails me. Mr. Fitzhugh approves of it, and that is good encouragement. I have little to complain of, except a low voice and lower spirits."

All these letters do not look like the proud, hard, self-sufficient woman so often described. We see her sorrowing sincerely, but not giving way to unreasoning, despairing grief; recognising that all the brightness and elasticity of life had gone, but doing, nobly and practically, what she could to help those that were left.

Before the end of the year she had arranged with Mr. James Ballantyne to act ten nights for the benefit of her son's family :—

"A thousand thousand thanks to you my kind and good friend for your most delightful and gratifying letter. You do me justice in believing that whatever conduces to your happiness, or that operates against it, must ever be interesting to me; and as the happiness and health of your excellent and most respectable mother is, I know, the first object of Satisfaction which this world contains for your duteous mind, I am, indeed, most truly happy, for both your sakes, to receive so comfortable an account of her. I can conceive no blessing comparable to that of having such a Son, and such a one was my own dear and lamented Henry. This last blow lay, indeed, for some time most heavily upon me; but when I recollect that his pure Spirit has exchang'd a Sphere of painful and

anxious existence, with which he was ill-calculated to Struggle, for the regions of everlasting peace and joy, I feel the Selfishness of my Sorrow, and repeat those words, which as often as repeated seem to tranquilize my mind, 'The Lord gave, and the Lord taketh away; blessed be the name of the Lord.' I hope my visit to Edinborough will be beneficial to my dear Son's family; at least, it will evince the greatest proof of respect for that Public on whom they depend, which it is in my power to give. I have some doubts whether the motives which induce me to return to the Public after So long an absence, will Shield me from the darts of malignity; and when I think of what I have undertaken, altho' I feel courageous as to my intentions, I own myself doubtful and weak with respect to the performance of the Task which I have undertaken. It is a great disadvantage to have been so long disused to the exertions I am call'd on to make, but I will not Suffer myself to think of it any longer. As to the arrangement of the Plays, it must be left entirely to Mrs. H. Siddons, whose judgment I have always found to be as Strong as her disposition is amiable, and I *can* give her no higher praise. She is indeed 'wisest, virtuousest, discreetest, best, &c.,' but I fear I shall never be able to present myself in Mrs. Beverley, who Should be not only handsome, but *young* also. Believe me, my truly estimable friend, I look forward with the greatest satisfaction to the moment of Seeing you again; in the meantime do not exalt me too much! You Seem to be in an error, on the Subject of my engagement, which I must rectify. The necessary expenses of Clothes, Ornaments, Travelling, &c., are more than my limited Income wou'd afford, without a chance, *at least,* of being able to *cover* these expenses,

which is all I desire! and therefore I am to fulfil my Engagement on my brother's Terms."

In November, therefore, we find her making her way by slow stages to Edinburgh. She stopped for several days at Kirby Moorside, with Sir Ralph and Lady Noel, and Lady Byron. In spite of nervousness and fatigue, she delighted her Edinburgh audiences. She had no reason to make a charge against her northern friends of unfaithfulness.

CHAPTER XVI.

OLD AGE.

In 1817 Mrs. Siddons, anxious, for the sake of her daughter Cecilia, to see more society, left her country retreat, Westbourne Farm, where so many hours of repose snatched from the turmoil of her professional life had been passed, and took a house in Upper Baker Street. It is the last house on the east side overlooking the Regent's Park, and has a small lawn and garden behind.

On the front, over the doorway, is a medallion stating that "Here Mrs. Siddons, the actress, lived from 1817 to 1831." When the houses in Cornwall Terrace were about to be brought close to the gate of the park, Mrs. Siddons appealed to the Prince Regent, who had ever remained her firm and courteous friend. He immediately gave orders that her view over the Park should not be shut off. The house, which is still unchanged in its internal arrangements, is now used as the estate office of the Portman property. The room she built out as a studio for modelling is screened off into compartments with desks for the transaction of business. That is really the only change that has been made. It is an old-fashioned,

comfortable house, panelled in dark oak. The approach to the staircase has steps ascending and descending, and the stairs themselves twist round corners, off which branch unexpected passages, until they reach the first floor, where to the right opens the dining-room, looking on the little garden, and beyond to the Park. There, between the Grecian pillars with their honeysuckle pediment, once hung the portrait of her brother John as Hotspur; now the space looks desolate and bare.

Here she lived with her daughter Cecilia and Patty Wilkinson, her attached friend and companion. Some among us are old enough to remember having heard of her pleasant parties where all that was intellectual and delightful in the London of her day was assembled. There she would sometimes, to her intimate friends, give recitations of her favourite parts, having by this time relinquished doing so in public. Miss Edgeworth describes one of these readings :—

I heard Mrs. Siddons read at her town-house a portion of *Henry VIII.* I was more struck and delighted than I ever was with any reading in my life. This is feebly expressing what I felt. I felt that I had never before fully understood, or sufficiently admired, Shakespeare, or known the full powers of the human voice and the English language. Queen Katherine was a character peculiarly suited to her time of life and to reading. There was nothing that required gesture or vehemence incompatible with the sitting attitude. The composure and dignity, and the sort of suppressed feeling, and touches, not bursts of tenderness, of matronly, not youthful tenderness, were all favourable to the general effect. I quite forgot to applaud—I thought she was what she appeared. The illusion was perfect, till it was interrupted by a hint from her daughter or niece, I forget which, that Mrs. Siddons would be encouraged by having some demonstration given of our feelings. I then expressed my admiration, but the charm was broken.

Maria Edgeworth seems to have remained friends with Mrs. Siddons, but her father, Richard Lovell

Edgeworth, hopelessly offended her the first time he met her:—

"Madam," he said, "I think I saw you perform Millamant five-and-thirty years ago."

"Pardon me, Sir."

"Oh, then it was forty years ago. I recollect it."

"You will excuse me, Sir, I never played Millamant."

"Oh, but I recollect it."

"I think," she said, stiffly turning to Rogers, "it is time for me to change my place," and rising with much haughtiness she moved away.

Many amusing stories were current of the dramatic manner which she imported into daily life. Her question, in the tragic tones of Lady Macbeth, to the overawed draper as she bought a piece of coloured print, "Will it wash?" The solemn reply to the Scotch provost, "Beef cannot be too salt for me, my Lord"; and "I asked for water, Boy; you 've brought me beer." Lord Beaconsfield told a story of his father, Isaac Disraeli, returning home after a visit to London, and declaring that the event that had made most impression on him was hearing Mrs. Siddons say, "The Ripstone Pippin is the finest apple in the world." Moore says he remembered how proud he was of going to Lady Mount Edgcumbe's suppers after the opera. It was at one of these, sitting between Mrs. Siddons and Lady Castlereagh, he heard for the first time the voice of the former (never having met her before) transferred to the ordinary things of the world, and the solemn words in her most tragic tone, "I do love ale dearly." Sidney Smith also describes her as "stabbing the potatoes"; and it is said that on hearing of the sudden death of an acquaintance, who had been "found

dead in his bureau," she understood the latter word to mean a piece of furniture, and exclaimed, "Poor man! How gat he there?"

She was, as a rule, perfectly impervious to external influences, ignoring them in her self-abstraction. She lived through the most marvellous period of English and European history, yet no incident seems to have made an impression on her mode of thought or life. She never entered into political interests, though the friend of Fox, Burke, and Sheridan. Her dramatic world of romance was all-sufficient for her. Hers was not a ready intelligence; she required time for everything, time to comprehend, time to speak; there was nothing superficial about her, no vivacity of manner. To petty gossip she could not condescend, and evil-speaking she abhorred. She cared not to shine in general conversation. Ask her her opinion, she could not give it until she had studied every side of the subject; then you might trust to it without appeal. This slowness of mental action led to a regal, stately, and majestic bearing, that gradually overlaid her genius to its detriment. As early as 1817, Fanny Burney describes her as—

> The heroine of a tragedy, sublime, elevated and solemn, in face and person truly noble and commanding, in manners quiet and stiff, in voice deep and dragging, and in conversation formal, sententious, calm, and dry I expected her to have been all that is interesting; the delicacy and sweetness with which she seizes every opportunity to strike and to captivate upon the stage had persuaded me that her mind was formed with that peculiar susceptibility which, in different modes, must give equal powers to attract and delight in common life. But I was very much mistaken. As a stranger I must have admired her noble appearance and beautiful countenance, and have regretted that nothing in her conversation kept pace with their promise.

We read in 1801 of Campbell meeting her walking

on the banks of Paddington Canal when she was living at Westbourne, and in a perfect agony of fear "whipping on his great-coat," and preparing himself for an interview with the "great woman."

Washington Irving gives a characteristic sketch of her :—

It was a rare gratification to see the Queen of Tragedy thus out of her robes. Yet her manner, even at the social board, still partakes of the state and gravity of tragedy. Not that there is an unwillingness to unbend, but that there is a difficulty in throwing aside the solemnity of long-acquired habit. She reminded me of Walter Scott's knights, "who carved the meat with their gloves of steel, and drank the red wine through their helmets barred." There was, however, entirely the disposition to be gracious, and to play her part like herself in conversation. She, therefore, exchanged anecdote and incident, in the course of which she detailed her feelings and reflections while wandering among the sublime and romantic scenery of North Wales, and on the summit of Penmaenmawr. As she did this her eye kindled and her features beamed, and in her countenance, which is indeed a volume where one may read strange matters, you might trace the varying emotions of her soul. I was surprised to find her face, even at the near approach of sitting by her side, absolutely handsome, and unmarked with any of those wrinkles which generally attend advanced life. Her form is at present becoming unwieldy, but not shapeless, and is full of dignity. Her gestures and movements are eminently graceful. Mr. and Mrs. Campbell say that I was quite fortunate, and might flatter myself on her being so conversible, for that she is very apt to be on the reserve towards strangers.

Mr. and Mrs. Campbell had every reason to say so, for only that very year she proposed dining with them one day, requesting, as she always did, that it was only to be a family party. About noon Washington Irving's brother and a friend, who had brought letters of introduction from Sir Walter Scott, arrived. During their visit a servant unfortunately came into the room and disclosed the fact that Mrs. Siddons was dining there. Immediately the Americans made up

their minds to stay and see her. Campbell told them how annoyed Mrs. Siddons would be at meeting strangers; they were not to be gainsaid:—

When the carriage approached the house, Campbell goes on, I went out to conduct her over a short pathway on the common, as well as to prepare her for a sight of the strangers. It was the only time, during a friendly acquaintance of so many years, that I ever saw a cloud upon her brow. She received my apology very coldly, and walked into my house with tragic dignity. At first she kept the gentlemen of the New World at a transatlantic distance; and they made the matter worse, as I thought, for a time; by the most extravagant flattery. But my Columbian friends had more address than I supposed, and they told her so many interesting anecdotes about their native stage and the enthusiasm of their countrymen respecting herself that she grew frank and agreeable, and shook hands with both of them at parting.

Many were the honours heaped on her during these last years. She received a formal invitation to visit the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge. Her daughter writes to Miss Wilkinson, expressing their delight with the visit:—

I over and over wished for you, who would have enjoyed as much as I did the attention and admiration shown to our Darling. We had sights to see, colleges and libraries to examine, and at every one of them there was a principal inhabitant, eager to show and proud to entertain Mrs. Siddons. In the public library, my mother received the honour of an address from Professor Clarke, who presented her with a handsome Bible from the Stereotype press. After which she read to almost all the members of the University at present there the trial scene in the *Merchant of Venice*, and more finely she never did it in her life. Everyone was, or seemed to be, enchanted and enthusiastic.

After her retirement from the stage, she gave public readings at the Argyll Rooms in London. The arrangements were most simple. A reading-desk with lights, on which lay her book, a quarto volume, printed in large letters. When her memory failed her, she assisted her sight by spectacles, which in the

intervals she handled and used so gracefully, that it was impossible to wish her without them. A large red screen formed an harmonious background to her white dress, and classically-shaped head, round which her dark hair was rolled in loose coils. All her former dignity and grace seemed to return in these readings. The effect she produced was marvellous, considering it was without the aid of stage illusion or scenery.

The attention shown her by the Royal Family was a source of much gratification. Her letters written, after a visit to Windsor, in January 1813, are almost girlish in their emphasis and expressions of delight.

She was in the middle of dressing to go and dine at Mrs. Damer's, when an especial messenger arrived in the dusk, from Lady Stewart, intimating the Queen's desires. Everything was rose colour. "The charming accomplished Princesses, so *sweetly* and *graciously* acknowledge the amusement I was so happy as to afford them. To have been able to amuse a little a few of the heavy mournful hours, the weight of which those royal amiable sufferers must so often feel, has been to me the *greatest*, the *proudest gratification*."

A magnificent gold chain, with a cross of many coloured jewels, was presented to her by the Queen, and a "silken quilt for my bed, which she sewed with her own hands."

On the 9th of June 1819, when past sixty, Mrs. Siddons was induced to appear for the benefit of her brother, Charles Kemble, at Covent Garden. She had done so before, at the command of the Princess Charlotte, who at the last moment had been unable to come. All the best critics were of opinion it was a mistake. The part chosen, too, Lady Randolph, was injudicious, with its lengthy speeches and continual

movement. The audience certainly gave three rounds of applause, in recognition of her personal character, when Young Norval asked:

> But did my sire surpass the rest of men
> As thou excellest all of woman kind?

But this was a poor substitute for the breathless thrill, the agony of emotion, with which she shook her audience in the old days.

Unfortunately for us and them, players are not immortal. Health, strength, beauty, voice, fail them, and without these adventitious aids genius is of no avail on the stage. Any loss of reputation to an actress like Mrs. Siddons was a loss to the world; these reappearances, when age and infirmity had weakened her powers, were much to be deplored. Let us, however, turn from this subject to more pleasant ones; and there were so many pleasant incidents and so few mistakes in Mrs. Siddons's dignified and decorous life, that we can afford to be lenient.

In Fanny Kemble's *Record of a Girlhood*, we get glimpses of Aunt Siddons, stately and gentle, surrounded by children and grandchildren.

> You know we were to spend Christmas Eve at my Aunt Siddons's; we had a delightful evening, and I was very happy. My aunt came down from the drawing-room (for we danced in the dining-room on the ground-floor) and sat among us, and you cannot think how nice and pretty it was to see her surrounded by her clan, more than three dozen strong; some of them so handsome, and many with a striking likeness to herself, either in feature or expression. Mrs. Harry and Ceey danced with us, and we enjoyed ourselves very much.

The younger sons of her son George Siddons (who had obtained a Government post at Calcutta), were being educated with their sisters in England, and always spent their holidays with their grandmother. Mrs. Siddons. The youngest of these three school-

boys was the father of the beautiful Mrs. Scott Siddons of the present day.

Mrs. Siddons was very fond of children. Campbell tells a story of his once leaving his little boy, aged six, with her, when she was stopping in Paris. When he returned, he found them both in animated conversation. She had been amusing him with all sorts of stories, which she told admirably. The evening before she had been to a fashionable party and offended everyone by the austerity of her manners.

Her letters about her grandchildren are full of simple grandmotherly love, naturally expressed. She wrote from Broadstairs in 1806 :—

"My dear Harry, I have very great pleasure in telling you that your dear little ones are quite well. The bathing agrees with them perfectly. They are exceedingly improved in looks and appetite, though their stomachs turn a little, poor dears, at the sight of the machines; but, indeed, upon the whole, the dipping is pretty well got over, and they look so beautiful after it, it would do your heart good to see them. I assure you they are the belles of Broadstairs. Their nurse is very good-humoured to them. She is certainly not a beauty, but they like her as well as if she were a Venus. Never were little souls so easily managed, or so little troublesome."

The great actress would boast with more pride of the effect she produced on a little girl during the performance of *Jane Shore*, than of her greatest triumphs. In the last scenes of the play, when the unfortunate heroine, destitute and starving, exclaims in an agony of suffering, "I have not tasted bread for three days," a little voice was heard, broken by sobs, exclaiming, "Madam, madam! do take my orange, if you please,"

and the audience and the actress beheld, in one of the stage boxes, a little girl holding her out an orange.

A lady, now alive, recalls to mind, when she was very young, being taken to pay a visit to "the great Mrs. Siddons." She long after remembered those wonderful eyes, and particularly the long silky eye-lashes, which she noticed were of extraordinary length, and curled upwards in a beautiful curve. On being told that the child was obliged to go away to the country, and would have no opportunity of hearing her on the stage, she kindly said she would recite for her, and did so there and then.

One of her grandchildren has described the interest of her visits to her. Frequently her grandmother would read to them, giving them the choice of the play. One evening in particular she recalled the reading of *Othello*. "It was a stormy night, and the thunder was heard occasionally, and she so grand and impressive; her look! her voice, her magnificent eyes, still clear and brilliant. It was real reading, not declamation, and yet the effect," she says, "was beyond anything I could conceive of the finest acting." This was only the winter before her death.

We find her now suffering all the fluctuations in spirits old age is subject to, sometimes complaining of feebleness and suffering, at others returning to all the girlish playfulness of her younger days. On July 12th, 1819, she writes to her friend Mrs. Fitzhugh:—

"Well, my dear friend, though I am not of rank and condition to be myself at the Prince's ball, my fine clothes, at any rate, will have that honour. Lady B—— has borrowed my Lady Macbeth's finest banquet dress, and I wish her ladyship joy in wearing it, for I found the weight of it almost too much for en-

durance for half an hour. How will she be able to carry it for such a length of time? But young and old are expected to appear, upon that 'high solemnity' in splendid and fanciful apparel, and many of these beauties will appear in my stage finery. Lady C—— at first intended to present herself (as she said very drolly) as a vestal virgin, but has now decided upon the dress of a fair Circassian. I should like to see this gorgeous assembly, and I have some thoughts of walking in in the last dress of Lady Macbeth, and swear I came there in my sleep. But enough of this nonsense."

Her brother John, sharer of most of her trials and triumphs, settled at Lausanne towards the end of his life. The loss of his society was a sad deprivation, and in 1821 she paid him a visit. Her daughter Cecilia, in a letter home, described the delights of the villa the Kembles lived in, and the beauty of the surrounding scenery.

Mrs. Siddons meditated an expedition to Chamounix but for some reason it was given up, and they went to Berne; the weather was wet, however, and they were obliged to return sooner than they expected. They ate chamois, crossed a lake, mounted a glacier with two men, cutting steps in the ice with a hatchet, and did all that was required of them as travellers. "My mother bore all the fatigues much more wonderfully than any of us," the letter ends.

In spite of her wonderful energy, old age was creeping on her apace. Erysipelas, which was ultimately fatal, frequently attacked her with a burning soreness in her mouth, or with headaches that were equally painful. She had to submit to that worst penalty of advancing years, the death of friends; those

of Mrs. Damer and of Mrs. Piozzi were a great loss. In February 1823, John Kemble died at Lausanne On the 9th he dined out, and it was remarked that he was in very good spirits; the next evening a few friends dropped in for a rubber of whist. The following Sunday he was out in his garden; but while he was sitting reading the paper, it fell from his hands. His wife rushed to him; he only faltered a few words, begging her not to be alarmed. The doctor was sent for, but one stroke after another seized him, and he died on the 20th. This was a sad blow to Mrs. Siddons.

In her seventy-third year she wrote to Mrs. Fitzhugh from Cobham Hall, the seat of Lord Darnley:—

"I have brought myself to see whether change of scene, and the cordial kindness of my noble host and hostess, will not at least do something to divert my torment. But real evils will not give way to such applications, gratifying though they may be. I have had the honour, however, of conversing with Prince Leopold; he is a very agreeable and sensible converser, and Her Royal Highness the Duchess of Kent seems to justify all the opinions of her amiability. I have begun to recover the loss of my dear little girls, George's daughters. How I long to hear they are safe in the arms of their anxious parents. In this magnificent place, I assure you, my seventy-second birthday was celebrated with the most gratifying and flattering cordiality. We had music and Shakespeare, which Lord Darnley has at his finger's ends. I should have enjoyed the party more if it had not been so large; but twenty-three people at dinner is rather too much of a good thing. . . . Talking of the arts, I cannot help thinking with sorrow of the statue of my

poor brother. It is an absolute libel on his noble person and air. I should like to pound it into dust, and scatter it to the winds.

"Yours,

"S. S."

A statue of the great actress, by Chantry, was put up later, by Macready, beside her brother's in Westminster Abbey.

In April 1831 she was attacked with the illness that was to prove fatal. The appearence of the erysipelas in one of her ancles alarmed the doctor, but she got better, and before the end of the month felt so far recovered, that she laughingly told him that he need not come to see her any more, for "she had health to sell."

Unfortunately, she ventured out driving soon afterwards, the day was cold, and a chill seemed to have developed the erysipelas internally. On the 31st May she was seized with sickness and ague, and in the course of the evening both her legs were attacked with erysipelatous inflammation. This increased during the night, and was accompanied by much fever. In the course of the following day there was a consultation of doctors. They pronounced the case hopeless, mortification supervened, and about nine on the morning of the 8th June she expired, after a week of acute suffering.

On the 15th June she was buried in the New Ground of Paddington Church, followed to the grave by her brother Charles Kemble, two sons of Henry Siddons, and many others. Alas! of her own immediate family few were left, and her eldest son was in India. In the procession were eleven mourning coaches, with

the performers of the Theatre Royal Drury Lane and Covent Garden. When the burial service had been read, a young woman, Campbell tells us, knelt down beside the coffin with demonstrations of the wildest grief. She came veiled, and her name was never discovered.

Why go into the items of the will Mrs. Siddons left, and the articles she assigned to her heirs? To us she has bequeathed the memory of one of the greatest dramatic artists that ever graced our stage, and of one of the noblest of the long list of noble women enrolled in the annals of our country. Time goes on whirling away all memories in its relentless rush. A new generation is ever ready to depreciate the enthusiasms of their grandfathers, and ours is incredulous when told of the powers of a Garrick or a Siddons.

It was with a feeling of pain that, while standing the other day by the great actress's grave where it lies lonely and untended in Paddington churchyard, we heard that our cousins across the Atlantic set more store on the memory of Sarah Siddons than we do. Miss Mary Anderson, the custodian told us, whenever she is in London, comes up on Sunday afternoons, with parties of her countrymen, to lay fresh flowers on the grave, and has undertaken, at her own expense, to execute all necessary repairs to the railings and tombstone. Let us, before it is too late, anticipate this high-minded and generous offer.

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